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THE
FREEMASON'S DAUGHTER.

THE
FREEMASON'S DAUGHTER:

A Novel.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "MINNIGREY," "WOMAN AND HER MASTER,"
"STANFIELD HALL," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE FREEMASON'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

Within the infant rind of this small flower
Poison hath residence, and medicine power;
For this being smelt, with that sense cheers each part—
Being tasted, stays all senses with the heart!

SHAKESPEARE.

MR. MORDAUNT'S first visit, on his arrival in London, was to an old and valued friend, Dr. Rand, one of the first practical chemists of the age, a man whose life had been passed in studies more or less abstruse: he had been a great traveller in his time, and in every land had picked up fragments of queer, out-of-the-way knowledge, more curious, perhaps, than useful.

Thus, he firmly believed that he had discovered the lost key to the tables of Ptolemy, had a theory of his own respecting the hieroglyphics of Egypt, and laughed equally at the discoveries of Denon and Champollion. His house, a large, old-fashioned mansion, near the glorious old Abbey of Westminster, was a perfect museum. Manuscripts from Pompeii, black-letter

volumes ransacked from half the monasteries of Europe, which, unlike most collectors, he prized more for their contents than rarity, crowded his book-shelves, or were piled in admired disorder on the tables and chairs in every room of the house.

Every day for the last ten years he had been on the point of assorting his vast collection, and reducing the learned chaos into order. But something invariably occurred to distract his attention from the task—some new discovery in science to test—some fresh error to refute.

“After all,” he would say, as he gazed hopelessly on the mass which had been the accumulation of years, “what does it signify? I know where to lay my hand upon any of my treasures. Let my heirs arrange them: life is too short for me to undertake the task.”

Mr. Mordaunt found his singular friend seated, as usual, in his study. Although it was an hour past mid-day when he called, his breakfast remained on the table, untasted. The doctor had been too much occupied in poring over a manuscript which had been sent for his perusal by a learned society in Paris, to pay the least attention to his sublunary requirements.

In his person he was tall and thin, resembling a dried mummy in the hard outlines of his smoke-coloured anatomy, rather than a living thing endowed with the vital principle. A long plaid dressing-gown, rent in various places, and darned in others, hid all the imperfections of his nether costume; and a greasy, red velvet skull-cap, from beneath which his long, thin, gray hair

escaped, added not a little to the singularity of his appearance.

Books, papers, and musty parchments were piled on the chairs and faded Turkey carpet, so as to be within reach of his hand as he required them, without disturbing himself by rising from his seat.

"Is that you, Deborah?" he peevishly exclaimed, as the door of the sanctum creaked upon its hinges, which, like everything else in his establishment, savoured of the rust of antiquity; "I thought I told you I would ring for breakfast when I felt hungry?"

The *savant* forgot that he had done so three hours previously, and that he had suffered the repast to remain untasted.

"It does not happen to be Deborah," replied his friend, with a smile; for he was no stranger to the peculiarities of the learned doctor.

"Coffee—anything you please," continued Rand, replying to what he supposed the usual inquiry of his faithful domestic.

"Look up," exclaimed Mordaunt, giving him at the same time a gentle slap on the shoulder; "look up, most learned moonshee. *Salam alikum salam*. If that does not rouse him," he thought, "he must be far gone indeed—too far for me, for my stock of Eastern lore is exhausted."

The old book-worm raised his eyes, and seemed for a few seconds bewildered between the oriental salutation and the appearance of his old friend.

"*Alikum Salame!*" he muttered; "pooh! of course—I recollect," he added, laying his forefinger between his eyebrows; "how ridiculous! Allah Kerim! God is great—Manchester—cotton—Mordaunt."

Closing the manuscript with a deep sigh, he placed it upon one of the piles of books near him; and, during the conversation which ensued, continued from time to time to regard it wistfully, like a child whose last new toy has been removed out of its reach.

"Well, Mordaunt," he exclaimed, offering his spectacle case to his visitor, instead of his hand; "what brings you to Babylon, as the moderns designate this mushroom metropolis? But I suppose the old story, gain, gain, still a worshipper of Mammon, eh?"

"I am still a merchant," replied his friend, "one of a class which you philosophers affect to despise, although I think you would be puzzled to do without us, with all your learning."

"There is much in the world that I pity," observed the doctor, "and but very little that I despise. Still it is to be regretted that you, who when a boy had such a happy disposition, did not devote yourself to study instead of commerce. How happy we might have been together, following the same pursuits. Here," he added, taking up the manuscript, "here is a treasure destined to settle one of the long-disputed questions which have divided the learned of all nations and ages. It contains the history of one of the lost tribes of Israel—the tribe of Ham: some contend it settled in India,

but its an error, sir, an error ; others in China, but they are equally mistaken. Now, where do you suppose the tribe of Ham settled ?”

“ In the *Sandwich Islands*, I should think,” gravely replied his visitor, unable to repress the joke, which the learned querist was very far, however, from perceiving.

“ Sandwich Islands,” he repeated, “ well, that is extraordinary ! What could put such an idea in your head ? Not but it may be worth examining. Have you any authority for hazarding such a supposition ?”

“ Only that of Josephus,” was the reply.

“ Josephus ! dear me, dear me. I don’t remember. I have read the learned Hebrew—collated the manuscript in the Ambrosian Library, at Milan, and its interpolated passages, with the copy in the Vatican—he does not even touch upon the point ; you must be mistaken.”

“ The Josephus I allude to,” observed Mordaunt, trying to look as serious as possible, “ was not Josephus the historian, but a certain English writer of that name—vulgarly called Joe Miller : a fellow who has chronicled more quaint things than any man of his time, and is, perhaps, quite as much quoted.”

“ And I have never met with him ! how extraordinary.”

His visitor thought it would have been much more so if he had ; but the jest had been carried far enough, and he hastened to change the subject.

"Here is a proof," he said, "that I am not quite so unmindful of the pursuit you love, as you suppose. The captain of one of my vessels brought it from Egypt, with a consignment of cotton. He is a shrewd, intelligent fellow, and I have intrusted him with a sort of roving commission, to pick up for me whatever he may meet with rare and curious."

Mordaunt placed in the hands of his old friend a manuscript composed of buffalo skins, attached at each end to a roll of sycamore wood. It was closely written over, in narrow columns, in the modern Hebrew character.

"And do you call this rare?" exclaimed Rand, with a smile of contempt, as soon as he had glanced over it; "a copy of the Pentateuch, such as is exposed in every synagogue in Europe—in common letters, not even the arrow-headed character—and written with points."

"And you see nothing remarkable in it?"

"Nothing—absolutely nothing—except that it is written upon buffalo-skin, which is not very usual in such copies."

"Hold it slanting towards the light—that will do; now move it gently."

The antiquary did as his friend suggested, when, to his astonishment, he detected, faint as the last shadow of twilight, beneath the modern characters, others of a more ancient date.

It was evident that the original manuscript had been effaced, to make room for the modern writing.

"Palimpsest!" exclaimed the astonished *savant*, holding out his arm towards Mordaunt, and eagerly shaking his own spectacle-case, imagining it to be his friend's hand; "this is a treasure. From a similar manuscript Angelo Mai gave to the world the last book of the 'Republica' of Cicero. We shall be immortalised! How often have I envied him his good fortune. Who knows," he added, bending with almost religious veneration over the skins, "but these may contain one of the lost Talmuds."

"And would its discovery be useful?"

"Useful!" repeated Rand, with enthusiasm; "immense! it would settle the mystery of the triangle of Enoch, and prove whether or no the temple in which, before the Deluge, the wise son of Noah concealed the key to earth's wisdom, was Calvary or Ararat. I have always contended for the last supposition myself, although the learned Polish rabbi Skyriverwetziski, in his synopsis in eight quarto volumes, contends for the contrary."

"And where would be the utility in settling the question between you and the learned rabbi Sk—Sk"—Mordaunt sneezed three times, by way of finishing the pronunciation of the Polish *savant's* name.

"Utility!" repeated Rand; "*cui bono!* that's always the question put by you merchants."

"And one reason, I suppose," observed his friend, "why you philosophers despise us?"

"I despise no one," again repeated the doctor; "and

merchants, on the contrary, are entitled to respect. The princely house of Medici were merchants; to them we owe the revival of the Greek language in Europe. The Phœnicians were traders, and the immortal Dionysius of Halicarnassus says"—

"Never mind what he says. The question is, what is your opinion of my manuscript?"

"That it is a gem, a priceless treasure."

"You would like to possess it, then?"

The book-worm's eyes sparkled at the proposition, as he answered, with a sigh—

"If you do not set too high a value on it."

"Listen to me," continued his friend, "and that you may do so, lay down the manuscript. When I first procured it, it was my intention to present it to you as a token of our long-standing friendship; circumstances have induced me to change my determination."

"An extravagant offer from some rich bibliophile," no doubt?"

"That would not tempt me; but listen."

Mordaunt related, in as few words as possible, his visit to the madhouse, and the suspicions he had conceived of the treatment to which poor Gridley had been subjected, and proposed that his friend should analyse the stains upon the handkerchief as the price of the palimpsest.

"A bargain!" exclaimed the man of science, joyfully. "Were the stains no larger than the gem upon your finger—which, by-the-bye, is, I perceive, a veri-

table antique, or plasma, as the matrix of the emerald is called—I would detect it; nay, if a fly had but dipped its tiny feet in the deleterious drug, and walked over the cambric, I would forfeit my life if I failed to name the plant or mineral from which the poison had been prepared.”

This, as his visitor well knew, was no idle boast, for the speaker was really one of the most profound chemists of the day. He had been the companion and friend of Davy, Brewster, and Faraday, and corresponded with most of the great men of Germany and France.

“Take it,” said Mordaunt, placing the handkerchief in his hand, “and heaven direct your researches to the truth.”

“Science always leads to truth—it is the only mistress which never deceives.”

Dr. Rand's first care was to wash the handkerchief in distilled water, which he afterwards poured into an earthen vessel, and then filled one of his testing-glasses with a portion only of the liquid, which had become of the colour of claret and water; to this he added alkalis, acids, and various tests, but without producing the least change, either by precipitating the colouring matter, or altering the hue, his visitor all the while watching the process with intense interest.

“Humph!” exclaimed the *savant*, with a look of disappointment; “it is not a mineral poison, that's very clear. Whoever prepared the draught, or whatever

you suspect to have been administered to your friend, he was no bungler at his trade."

The testing-glass was placed carefully on one side, and a second one filled. Various other experiments were tried, but always with the same result.

The doctor began to look both embarrassed and interested.

"At fault?" observed Mordaunt. "What becomes of your boast?"

"Wait," said the old man, testily, "wait. You were always impatient from a boy. True, I have tried most of the ordinary tests, but I am not to be baulked at the first difficulty. Were the secret buried in the centre of the earth I'd find a way to dig it up. I see," he added, with a smile, "I shall have to con my manuscript."

With these words he rose, and, opening an old-fashioned Dutch cabinet, took from it a small silver casket and a pair of crystal scales, so finely balanced that the hundredth part of a hair would turn them; in one of these he put a golden weight, not much larger than a good-sized pea, and filled the other with a delicate white powder, which he took from the casket, till the balance was even.

"What is this?" demanded his friend, pointing to the contents of the scale.

"Don't approach too near!" exclaimed the chemist, "lest your breath should affect the purity of the preparation, for it absorbs humidity like a sponge; that is

the reason I keep it so carefully from the air. It is a sublimation of the calcareous cist which red quicksilver leaves in the crucible after a peculiar process, kept secret for ages by the Chinese, and first made known to Europe by the Jesuit Pozzi, who was strangled by Fan Ki, the emperor who preceded his present majesty on the throne of that remarkable country. I had it," he added, "from the present general of the order, Roothan, a Dutchman of uncommon merit. He corresponds in eleven languages, without the assistance of a secretary, though that is nothing to Mizzofante, who both speaks and writes thirty, without ever having quitted his native Italy."

"Is it possible?" said Mordaunt.

"Everything is possible," observed his friend, "to perseverance and study."

As soon as the speaker dropped the powder into the testing-glass a gentle effervescence took place, and the colour of the liquid gradually changed from a pale, dirty red, to a deep violet—in fact, almost a purple. On adding a few drops of acid, the effervescence became much more violent, and a not unpleasant perfume filled the room from the disengaged air which rapidly escaped.

"Ah, ah!" exclaimed the doctor, with a smile of satisfaction, "I thought I should succeed at last; in fact, I should like to find the combination which would defeat me."

"It is poison, then?" solemnly demanded his friend.

"Vegetable poison," replied Rand, nodding his head. "Not that death must follow, as a necessary consequence—that would, in all probability, depend upon the dose. The scale could, without doubt, be so nicely graduated as to produce madness, apoplexy or congestion of the brain."

"And what is the name of the infernal drug?"

"I have not the least idea," replied his friend, setting down the glass. "Wait a few minutes till the process of precipitation is accomplished, and then I'll name it to you."

For some time the two friends continued to converse upon different subjects, till at last the process was complete, and a small, delicate, violet powder, after pouring off the water, remained at the bottom of the glass. The doctor tasted it once or twice with his tongue.

"Singular—very singular!" he exclaimed. "Where the deuce did he procure it?"

"My dear fellow, what is it?" demanded the impatient Mordaunt.

"The *spinosa artellicum*, a most extraordinary plant, found only in the elevated regions of the Andes—properties various, but perfectly capable of producing the effects you describe. I have never seen it in its natural state, but it belongs to the *tetradynamia* class of plants; cruciform petals; seeds few and orbicular."

"You think, then, there can be little doubt but that

my suspicions are well founded, and poor Gridley has been drugged ? ”

“ None—none in the least ; if, as you say—and which, of course, no one who knows you, can for a moment doubt—you wiped the dark liquid you describe from his lips, and saw it flowing from his mouth, I am as certain that he has been drugged as if I had administered it myself.”

“ Will you give me a note to the Chancellor to that effect ? ”

“ Certainly,” replied the doctor, after a moment’s pause. “ But I must deal honestly with you—Lord Weathercock and myself are no longer friends.”

“ How so ? ”

“ You know his weakness ; he must have a smattering of everything. I had the misfortune to prove that he was wrong on a point of natural philosophy, and he never forgave it.”

“ Pooh, pooh ! he has long since forgotten it.”

The chemist looked at his friend with a smile, which seemed to say, “ How little he knew of the world.”

He felt pleased that, with all Mordaunt’s penetration, there was one point in knowledge of mankind in which he surpassed him.

“ Don’t believe it, my dear fellow—don’t believe it. No men hate so bitterly as philosophers who can’t agree. His lordship might have pardoned my thinking him ignorant, but never my having proved him so. Still, if you insist, there is the letter.”

“And there is the manuscript; and now, my good fellow, adieu. Should I receive any more similar treasure from Egypt, you shall not be forgotten.”

The speaker might as well have addressed the words to the air, for the learned doctor no sooner had the precious palimpsest in his hands, than he sank with a sigh of intense satisfaction into his easy chair, and in an instant was lost to all besides.

The very next day Mordaunt forwarded a letter to the Lord Chancellor, containing a statement of what had occurred, and inclosing, as confirmation of his story, the letter and analysis of Dr. Rand.

Five days afterwards he received a reply from the secretary of that learned functionary, acknowledging the receipt of his communication, and pointing out to him the regular professional channel through which such an application should be made.

Rand was right; no men hate like your philosophers.

CHAPTER II.

DESPITE the rough and hitherto unchecked energy of Gilbert Grindem's mind, as the time passed on at the expiration of which he was to give a final answer to the proposition of his partner, the resolution became less firm.

He was too completely in his power to resist; and Small was quite artful enough, the first explanation over, not to rouse his victim by too much tyranny. His manners gradually settled down to their usual respectful tone, and, but for an occasional twinkle of his small, keen, gray eye, when it met the glance of Grindem, the latter might have concluded that he had forgotten the matter altogether, or that it was one of those horrible dreams which *will* visit, despite calomel and taraxicum, the o'ertaxed brain.

Although forced to yield, he resolved to preserve his dignity to the last; and on the morning of the third day, he called Small into the private room.

"I have been thinking, Small," he began, in a tone of voice which showed how violent was the restraint

under which he laboured, "that it is time I should mark the sense I entertain of the services you have rendered the firm for some years past."

"And the services I may still render it," interrupted the little man, significantly.

"True—true," continued Grindem, with an impatient wave of the hand; "you will, therefore, from this day, be admitted as an equal partner in the house. I shall draw five per cent for the capital employed, and the rest of the profits," he added, with a sigh, "shall be divided between us."

Small's eyes dilated with joy at the proposition—it was more than in his wildest hopes he had ever dreamed of. At times, in imagination, he had fancied himself a partner with a fifth—or, after his second bottle of wine, with a third—share in the profits; but half, a clear half—he already felt himself a second Cræsus.

"Are you satisfied?" continued his partner.

"Perfectly," muttered Small, "perfectly; nor do I think the firm will suffer by the accession, since I shall bring increased energies to the task."

"Yes, yes, we know all that; but the papers?" whispered Grindem.

"Are safe, quite safe, in my possession," answered Small.

"And when shall they be given up?"

"When all is signed and sealed," said the little man. "Not that I doubt you," he added, observing the dark scowl upon his partner's brow; "but prudence is

necessary in every transaction of life, even between relatives and friends."

The speaker had not the least intention of parting with the important documents which gave him so firm a hold over his wealthy partner; although he held out the promise of so doing, in order to induce him to sign the deed which made him his equal in the firm.

"And when shall it be settled?" he demanded.

"As soon as the deed can be prepared," sighed Grindem.

"That can be in two or three days at the furthest. My dear sir," he added, in one of his blandest tones, "I trust that the few unpleasant words which passed between us the other day will make no difference in our friendship?"

"To our what?" sharply demanded Grindem.

"To our friendship, sir," repeated Small, colouring slightly.

"Not in the *least*," was the dry reply.

"Thank you, sir. Handsome and Christian-like—exactly what I expected from a man of your sense and experience in the world. Of course," he added, and there was a peculiar inflection in Small's voice as he spoke, which jarred the nerves of the millionaire, "you will dine with me and my friends on the occasion."

"You know I seldom dine out."

"But this is an extraordinary occasion," urged the little man. "Mrs. Small will be delighted to make

your acquaintance, and the dear girls are so longing to see you."

"Are they?" growled the merchant, with a ferocious look; for the idea of being forced, as it were, into the domestic circle of the Smalls, was an additional annoyance.

"You will feel quite at home amongst them."

"Shall I?"

"Pray do come."

The words were those of entreaty, but the tone in which they were uttered was distinctly that of command. The precious vessel, as Mr. Small designated the chosen partner of his cares and happiness, was not unworthy of her husband in the way of manœuvring, and had already conceived sundry projects of her own. She had, therefore, impressed upon the mind of her husband the necessity of prevailing upon his partner's appearing at the dinner which, as a matter of course, would be given on the occasion.

"Well, then, if I must, I must. Perhaps," he added, "it would look a little odd if I were absent, so you may expect me."

With this salvo to his pride, which Small secretly smiled at, Grindem gave his consent to be of the party, which was to take place on the very day the new deed of partnership was signed.

"God help me!" exclaimed the merchant, as soon as he was alone. "I could have borne anything rather than the falling into the hands of such a wretch—a

creature whom I have raised from the condition of a shoeblack and drudge in my office, till at last he has become my equal. Why did I refuse to listen to old Gridley's advice? My pride has been my ruin. Had I permitted Henry to marry Amy Lawrence, I might have defied this cringing reptile and all his menaces. Too late—too late! Henry is at St. Petersburg; and I have fallen, like a fool, into my own snare."

There was a gentle tap at the door.

"Come in!" roared Grindem; for his nerves were in a fearful state of excitement.

To his increased annoyance, Mr. Crab made his appearance.

"Good!" groaned the merchant, internally. "This promises to be a pleasant day. I shall not forget it in a hurry. Well, Mr. Crab," he demanded, "what news of my old clerk?"

The madhouse-keeper shook his head, and carefully closed the door.

"Speak out man," continued Gilbert; "I can bear anything—anything! My nerves are iron!"

Had he said *were* iron, he would have been nearer the truth; but the events of the last few days had fearfully shaken them. He took nervous excitement for resolution, in the same way that many men mistake desperation for courage.

"I have received a friendly hint from the secretary of the Chancellor, that that meddling fellow Mordaunt, whose visit I told you of, if you remember"—

"If I remember!" impatiently interrupted the merchant; "I had good reason to remember it—it cost me five hundred pounds."

"Ah, so it did. Well, then, he has laid a formal complaint against my establishment—an establishment, Mr. Grindem, which has been cited both in and out of Parliament as a model for the three kingdoms to imitate and be proud of. Fortunately the complaint was informal—that has occasioned some delay; but his lordship must notice it."

"And the result will be"—

"That Gridley, if in a lucid interval, will be set at liberty."

"But he will not be in a lucid interval! You and Chinon—I think that is the name of the infernal French doctor you told me of—will provide for that."

"Impossible!"

"Nothing is impossible where money is at command."

"In this case, quite. That suspicious hound Mordaunt, when he visited the wretched man in his cell, perceived upon his lips a sort of syrup—merely a soothing mixture, which we sometimes give our patients when they are violent—and wiped them with his handkerchief."

"What then?" demanded the merchant.

"Ah, my dear sir, if your life, like mine, had been devoted to science, you would not demand what then. He has had the stains upon the infernal cambric analysed by a man whose reputation is of European

celebrity, so there is no hope of proving that he has been mistaken in his decision ; and he has pronounced that the drug—whose properties I am confident Chinon could not have been aware of—is calculated to procure temporary madness—nay, even death.”

Grindem started from his seat, and paced the narrow limits of the office. The edifice which had so many years been resting on no better foundations than falsehood and fraud, seemed crumbling around him.

A prudent man would have quitted it, but he clung to it to the last.

Pausing abruptly, he fixed his eyes upon his visitor, and demanded, in a hoarse whisper, what he had to propose.

“Propose!” blandly repeated Crab. “I, my dear sir ! absolutely nothing. Of course I am not answerable for any error of judgment which Chinon may have accidentally fallen into. I cannot be supposed to have any interest in the affair. The certificate upon which the patient was admitted was duly signed by two respectable medical men ; besides all this,” he added, proudly, “my character is above suspicion. Ah, Mr. Grindem, *we* know the value of reputation. What is a man without it ?”

The countenance of the merchant, during this long harangue, changed to a waxy hue. He had rapidly considered all the consequences of Gridley’s restoration to liberty, and they were summed up in these words, ruin and infamy.

His mind was made up—he resolved, at any risk, and at any sacrifice, to prevent it.

Any attempt to bribe old Gridley, after the cruel treatment he had received, he knew, from the old man's dogged character, to be equally hopeless. He decided, therefore, on his death. The question was, how to make the proposition to Crab without compromising himself. To do it directly, he knew would be useless.

Stretching himself out at his ease in his chair, he fixed his glance upon his visitor, who replied to it with a look which invited to confidence. It was evident that if they did not already understand one another, they very soon would.

“You have had a great deal of trouble,” he observed, “with my unfortunate clerk?”

“A very great deal,” answered Crab, in the same tone.

“In the event of his death, I should be placed in an awkward position.”

“How so?” demanded his visitor, who knew, on the contrary, that such an event would be the consummation of the speaker's wishes.

“Because I have five thousand pounds of his in my hands—the savings of his long, penurious existence. No one knows it, for it has always been the fellow's whim to seem poor. Not that he need fear the importunities of his relatives, for he has not one in the world that ever I heard of.”

"Five thousand pounds!" repeated Crab, to himself. "It's a good round sum. What can he be driving at?" Of course he was not deceived by the statement of the wily merchant, but perfectly understood his method of putting a case. Indeed he had frequently practised it himself—it saved disagreeable explanations. He merely nodded to Grindem, as much as to say, "I am all attention."

"Should he die," continued the speaker, "I should scarcely know how to act with regard to the money. And as he has no relations it would fall to the Crown; but that would be absurd."

"Very," said his visitor.

"I really think," resumed Grindem, "that in such an event I should best repay your care to him in his misfortune in making you his heir, and transferring the money to you."

"Are you serious?" demanded Crab.

"Perfectly."

It was now the turn of the keeper of the madhouse to pause and consider. He knew that, with the assistance of Chinon, it would be easy. The only difficulty was in assuring himself that, in the event of Gridley's death, his old master would keep faith with him. Rogues seldom like to trust each other.

"The melancholy event you allude to is perhaps nearer at hand than you imagine. But you will forget your promise then?"

"No, no."

"Most men do," observed Crab, with an incredulous smile. "Of all promises, the last I put faith in is the promise of a legacy; I have been so often deceived."

"I never break my promises," observed the merchant, impressively. "Like the acceptance of the firm, I hold them sacred."

"Well," exclaimed his visitor, after a slight pause, "our conversation has taken rather a singular turn. Would you have any objection to write me a letter to the effect that you have five thousand pounds belonging to Gridley in your hands, and that, in the event of his dying intestate, as he has no relations, you would petition the Crown to grant it to me, in consideration of my care of him."

"Certainly not," exclaimed Grindem. "I'll send you such a letter with the greatest pleasure."

"When?"

"To-day."

"I did not wish to afflict you," observed Mr. Crab, lowering his voice; "but your old clerk is sinking rapidly. In fact, I think you may soon expect to hear some fatal news of him."

"Indeed! Poor fellow!" was the hypocritical rejoinder.

"Would you like to see him in the event of anything in the shape of fatal symptoms taking place?"

"No," said the merchant, with a shudder; "not for the world. I hate to look on death."

"Prejudice, sir—mere prejudice."

Shortly after the preceding conversation the two worthies separated.

Not a word which could in any way be construed as alluding to the murder of the poor clerk had passed between them, and yet the bargain was as regularly struck, as perfectly well understood, and the price as determined, as though the conditions had been engrossed on parchment, and the contracting parties set their hands and seals to the infernal compact.

"Quite a man of business," thought Crab, as he directed his steps towards his select establishment; "takes a straightforward view of a difficulty, and suffers no ridiculous scruples of what fools calls conscience to step between himself and his purpose; many men in his position would have blurted out a proposition which, as a matter of prudence and common sense, of course I must have declined—and not only declined, but expressed a becoming indignation at; for the appearance, as the world goes, is of more consequence than the reality of virtue. What a beautifully ingenious idea," he added, "of coming to an understanding! no useless confidence! I must follow the same tactics with Chinon."

Full of this prudent resolution he reached his home, and, having first taken a few glasses of his favourite wine, in order to arrange his ideas, he rang the bell. It was answered by the faithful Barnes.

"Is the doctor in the house?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir."

"Send him to me."

"I believe he is writing his weekly report," observed the fellow.

"No matter, I wish to see him on very particular business."

The keeper withdrew, and the next minute the little Frenchman made his appearance.

Crab was too much a man of the world to come directly to the point, even with the doctor, whom he knew from long and useful experience to be about as unprincipled a rascal as he was himself.

Pushing the decanter towards him, he begged him to try the wine, and commenced the conversation by a few general inquiries respecting the state of his patients; which the man of science answered with his usual brevity—for he was sparing of words even with his employer.

"Something is in the wind," he thought, "or Crab would never be so gracious," for as a general rule, the head of the establishment never sought his society unless he had some point to gain, or some scheme of rascality to propose.

"Consoling—very consoling," observed the principal, "to find that so many of our inmates are in a fair way of recovery; for ours is a mission of mercy, doctor, as well as science."

"Certainly."

"By-the-by, don't you think you are pushing the convalescence of Miss Orme a little too rapidly?" he

continued. "I have no faith in such very sudden recoveries. Of course I only throw out these hints for your consideration, for I make it a rule never to interfere with the medical treatment of the patients—that is your affair; but I have had great experience—very great."

The unfortunate lady in question was rich, and her niece, whom she had educated and established in marriage, *paid well* for her. In fact, she was one of Mr. Crab's best patients, and Chinon perfectly understood the hint, that nature was not to be allowed to work a cure. It was never intended she should recover.

"Perhaps you are right," replied the doctor. "Indeed you generally are."

His employer felt satisfied that he was understood, and changed the subject.

"By-the-by," he demanded, "how is Gridley?"

"Sinking, sir—sinking rapidly."

This was the very opening the tempter wished for, and he hastened to seize it.

"Again you must permit me to differ with you. His mind I believe to be irretrievably gone; but his bodily health I am convinced is excellent."

Chinon's only reply was an incredulous smile.

"Indeed," continued the speaker, "so convinced am I that I am in the right—with all due deference, of course, to your professional skill—that *I would willingly bet you five hundred pounds* he lives over any date you may name that is in reason. *Say fifteen days.*"

"Five hundred pounds!" slowly repeated the doctor.

"Five hundred pounds," said Mr. Crab, lowering his voice, for, despite his hypocrisy, and the very clever way in which the temptation was put, he felt afraid of being overheard.

"It's a large bet."

"Very."

There was a mutual pause, during which the speakers eyed each other narrowly: one to note the way in which the proposition was received; and the other to assure himself that it was meant seriously. Satisfied that such really was the case, Chinon was the first to renew the conversation.

"So convinced am I," he said, "that I am right in my calculations, that I would not hesitate a moment, *had the bet been a thousand pounds.*"

"You take it then?" exclaimed Crab, his eyes sparkling like a viper's suddenly exposed to the influence of the sun.

"*I did not say that;* I merely observed that I should not hesitate to bet a thousand pounds upon my opinion."

There was a second pause: the speaker had named the price at which he was ready to undertake the *scientific murder* of the unhappy clerk; it was for Crab either to accept or to reject it.

"You are a desperate gambler," observed the latter, with a sigh; "*but I take it.*"

"He must be devilish well paid," thought the little Frenchman, "to disgorge so large a sum;" but he

kept his thoughts to himself, and merely muttered the monosyllable "Done."

"Done."

The two worthies touched each other's hands in token of their compact, and that the old clerk's fate was sealed.

But all the arrangement was not yet concluded.

"I must have more confidence in your honour even than in your skill," observed Crab, with a smile which he intended to be friendly, but which in reality was ghastly; "for a physician has so much in his power."

"True," said the doctor, with a sinister smile.

"By-the-by, of what disease do you think the poor fellow will die?"

The man of science paused for a few seconds before he answered the question; and when he did, it was with the air of a person whose opinion had changed to certitude.

"Apoplexy."

"Not unlikely," observed Crab; "especially as he has been a hard drinker. Poor wretch, fortunately, he has no friends."

"But he must have powerful enemies," thought the little Frenchman, only he kept the opinion to himself.

"Here," continued the speaker, "is a curious, rambling sort of letter, which I received this morning from the secretary of the Chancellor. That fool, old Mordaunt, whose visit you doubtless recollect, has made some ridiculous statement; but as it was not

brought before his lordship in the usual form, *as yet* no notice has been taken of it; although doubtless there will be."

"Doubtless," repeated the doctor, after reading the letter, which, as he thought, sufficiently explained the proposal of Mr. Crab.

"Of course, I have nothing to fear," observed the last-named person, with an air of virtuous satisfaction.

"Nothing," echoed his accomplice.

"*Should anything fatal occur to poor Gridley*, you will be careful to have the body properly examined by the best medical authorities in the town. In the event of a fit of apoplexy, summon an inquest; everything must be regular in my establishment."

"Of course. By-the-by, Mr. Crab, shall we make a little memorandum of our bet."

"No, no," hastily answered his employer; "at least, not now," he added, seeing that the doctor looked blank at his refusal. "To tell the truth, I don't feel quite well. I believe I must trouble you to prescribe for me."

Chinon felt his pulse.

"Nervous system out of order. A little anodyne mixture will set you to rights—shall I prepare it?" demanded the Frenchman.

"Yes."

"Are you going out?"

"Not again to-day; you will find me here."

While the man of drugs went to his laboratory to

prepare the draught, Crab turned over in his mind the proposal which the former had made—that he should give a written memorandum of the bet, as the infamous contract they had entered into was styled between them—and finally determined to refuse it—it was too dangerous. He resolved rather to forego the affair altogether, than compromise himself by an act which, coupled with Grindem's letter, would prove that he had a direct interest in the old clerk's death; besides, he was not without the hope of being able ultimately to evade the payment of the sum; as the deed once accomplished, Chinon, for his own sake, would be compelled to keep silence on the subject.

"Give a written memorandum of our wager!" he murmured, with a knowing smile, "who would be the fool then? I would as soon trust myself at sea on a single plank."

Crab was a cunning man—certainly a very cunning one, and yet, with all his foresight, he blindly followed the doctor's prescriptions, *and swallowed his medicines.*

The next moment the son of Æsculapius returned with a small glass, containing a colourless mixture, which his employer unhesitatingly drank off.

"Poh!" he exclaimed; "it is very bitter."

"Not the less efficacious," answered the other, with an air of satisfaction.

"I have been thinking, doctor," said his employer, "that it would be unwise, as well as useless, to write

the conditions of our bet: it might have a curious look in the event of any accident."

"Well perhaps it would."

"We can trust to each other's honour in the transaction."

"Doubtless," replied Chinon, with an ironic sneer; "at all events, I can trust to you *now*."

Crab did not notice the peculiar emphasis which the speaker laid upon the word "now," but secretly congratulated himself upon the facility with which his accomplice waived the, to him, only objectionable part of the arrangement.

Strange to say, despite the skill of the surgeon, Mr. Crab's indisposition did not decrease.

Every morning he awoke with a painful sense of heaviness upon his brain, which could only be removed by a second prescription, of a dark-green colour: and so he went on, day after day, *alternating the two mixtures*, without the least suspicion that the Frenchman was playing him false.

CHAPTER III.

Let feeble hands, iniquitously just,
Rake the cold relics of the sinful dust;
Let ignorance mock the pang it cannot feel,
And malice brand what mercy would conceal.
It matters not—earth cannot judge the dead;
Its censures sting not when the spirit's fled.

FROM the day on which the above conversation took place, the health of poor old Gridley rapidly declined.

It was in vain that he refused to swallow the prescriptions—the keepers were always at hand with the drenching-horn, to enforce obedience.

He complained of the heavy weight upon his brain, and listened, with an incredulous look, to the assurance that the medicine was intended to remove it. He was in the full possession of his faculties, and felt that he was being gradually and scientifically murdered.

So heavy and debilitated did he at last become, that his persecutors relaxed in their vigilance, and the door of his cell was frequently left unbarred; they knew that he was incapable of attempting to escape; indeed, he had scarcely energy left to raise his head from the

pillow, which for so many tedious weeks, it had nightly pressed.

Childhood is not only naturally grateful, but generous and compassionate. Poor little Lizzy heard the cold, calculating speculation of the keeper as to how long the old clerk would last, with sorrow as well as terror. She remembered how often she had sat upon his knee at the Widow Bentley's, listening to the stories he used to tell for the amusement of the children; the toys he used to make for them, and the little gifts it was his delight to bestow; for he was one of those who loved the sparkling eye and merry laugh of childhood.

It had been the misfortune of Gridley's life that he was a bachelor. Had he been blest with a sensible companion to advise and direct him, with offspring to care for, he might have been a wiser and a better man; as it was, his heart, like a neglected garden, produced rank weeds, which choked the growth of healthful pleasures.

There is something in the idea of death, which excites not only a vague fear, but a restless curiosity in most children; and the keeper's daughter lingered restlessly about the long corridor which led to his cell.

A nameless terror kept her from approaching too near; and, as often as she retreated, an equally powerful sentiment of curiosity and affection prompted her to return.

"I should like to see him once more," she thought, "before he dies. Poor old man! quite alone; and he

has no child to kiss him. Perhaps, too, he would be glad to see my face again."

Armed with these thoughts, she took resolution, and advanced, trembling, on tip-toe, to the door of the cell—it was ajar.

Her little heart trembled violently ; and more than once she turned to retrace her steps.

The last time a deep sigh arrested her. She hesitated no longer, but peeped in.

Her old friend was so changed since she last saw him, that Lizzy could scarcely recognize him ; his head had been shaved, and the fearful appearance of his ghastly complexion was heightened by the blood-shot eyes, which glared heavily from the black and green circles round them ; he was thin to emaciation, and breathed hardly through his nostrils, for his lips were compressed by the agony he had so long endured ; the lower one was considerably swollen, for, in one of his paroxysms he had bitten it through.

Stupified as he was, he recognised the intelligent little face which appeared at the half-open door, peering with painful interest at him, and faintly pronounced her name.

" Lizzy."

" You know me ? Oh, I am so glad."

" Don't fear," he murmured ; " come near me ? I am calm, Lizzy—quite calm," and the dying man burst into a flood of tears ; they relieved him. The affectionate child wiped them as they trickled down

his withered cheeks, her own at the same time flowing freely.

"Water—water!" he murmured.

The child poured some from the jug in the cell into the little tin which all the patients were furnished with, and approached it to the sufferer's lips.

"No, no; dip your handkerchief in it, and apply it to my poor head."

She did as she was requested, and the cooling application drove from the gorged brain a small portion of the blood with which it was unnaturally charged. A deep-drawn sigh told how much he felt relieved.

"Lizzy," he said, "I am dying, but don't be frightened; I shall not harm you. You remember your little brother, Edward?"

"Yes," sobbed his visitor.

"You saw him when he was dead—you were not afraid of him?"

"Oh, no," exclaimed the child; "he loved me dearly."

"Then why fear me? don't I love you? They have killed me, Lizzy," he added, impressively; "killed me! will you remember my words?"

"Yes—yes."

"If ever you see Amy Lawrence or Mr. Beacham, tell them all you have seen—all that I have said; that Mr. Grindem sent me here to prevent my disclosing how he had robbed poor Lawrence, Amy's father, of a

fortune; and bid them ask Tim's Dick for—for the papers I gave him; promise me this."

"I will."

"Remember, Lizzy, a promise to the dead is sacred. The papers—Tim's Dick."

The poor little thing was too much agitated to speak; she merely nodded her head in sign that she understood him.

With a deep groan, the speaker, who had raised himself upon his elbow, fell back upon his pillow.

"Mr. Crab—shall I call Mr Crab?" demanded the child.

The words seemed to recall him to himself.

"No," he groaned, "no! I would die in peace with all makind. I pardon even him. Stay by me a few minutes—only a few, Lizzy. Let the last countenance I gaze on be human—innocent—one that loves and pities me. Do you know any prayer, Lizzy? Pray, pray for me. God loves the voice of childhood. I have no one else to intercede for me."

The innocent girl did as she was directed; sinking on her knees, as distinctly as her sobs would permit her, she repeated the Lord's Prayer.

"God bless you, Lizzy!" murmured the dying man; "He is all merciful—reads the heart's penitence. Architect of the world, I acknowledge the justice of Thy hand. Pray on, pray on."

With a feeling which Lizzy could not understand, poor Gridley drew the sheet over his countenance.

It was to prevent her witnessing the last struggle—the final separation of the spirit from the frail temple of clay in which it had so long been confined.

A violent heaving of the chest followed, and a deep groan, then he lay comparatively still.

Lizzy recommenced the Lord's Prayer.

Before she arrived at the conclusion, she was terrified to observe blood gradually oozing from that portion of the sheet which covered the clerk's countenance.

Instinctively she moved it away; the eyes were fixed—the jaw had fallen—Simon Gridley was a corpse!

Half an hour afterwards, when the keeper entered the room, he found the child senseless upon the little mat at the foot of the bed. It was some days before she recovered, and long, very long, ere she was seen to smile again.

All in the establishment attributed her illness to a fright she had received on entering the cell and finding the old man dead. None suspected that she had witnessed his last moments. She kept that a secret to herself.

An inquest was duly summoned. The coroner and jury lunched with Mr. Crab. Several of the medical men of Manchester assisted at the opening of the body. Death from apoplexy was their general opinion; a verdict was returned accordingly, and three days after, the remains of him who had sinned and suffered were committed to the grave, followed only by Tim's Dick—

who, though still weak from his adventure in the cellar, insisted on paying the last mark of respect to the memory of his old friend—and the Widow Bentley, with whom he had lodged so many years.

The general observation, when the news of Gridley's death was heard, was—

“So the old drunkard is gone at last.”

And with these few brutal words, a kind but erring heart was consigned to its last resting-place.

None considered what had been the sufferings and temptations of him they censured—his hours of deep remorse, his lonely communings with feelings which, like the sensitive plant, shrink even from the touch of sympathy.

The gray-headed old man had once been young, dreamed in youth, perhaps, of a home of love, of children to endear it, of a life of usefulness and honour. Who knows what treachery or disappointment blighted those hopes, and turned his heart to prey upon itself—what had driven him to seek in intoxication the only solace left—forgetfulness.

Man judges the crime—heaven the temptation.

Let weak humanity, turning from the sinner's grave, hesitate ere it pronounces judgment upon its fellow-clay. There are, even in this miserable world, few creatures so debased but some trace of Eden lingers in them still.

Poor Tim's Dick, after the assistants had hurriedly performed the last office to the dead, seated himself

upon a neighbouring tombstone. Although far from having any definite conviction, he had a vague suspicion that all was not right.

Then the coroner's inquest, and the evidence of the medical men—there was no gainsaying that; the more he thought the more he was bewildered. The loss of the papers, too, pressed heavily upon him.

"I may not live to see it," he murmured, half aloud, "but God sees it. A strange tale will one day come to light. Poor old man! he had a kind heart, let them say what they will about his head. I'd rather sleep as he sleeps, than change places with either Grindem or Small, with all their riches."

"That's exactly my opinion," observed a voice near him.

Tim looked round, and saw that the speaker was no other than Marjoram, the police-officer.

"You here, sir!" observed the weaver, distrustfully.

"Ay," said the man; "come, don't bear any malice about the affair of the papers—it was not my fault."

"Whose, then?"

"I mean to say it was my duty to act as I did. Two respectable merchants—for Grindem and Small are both respectable"—

"In their way," interrupted Tim.

"Complain," continued Marjoram, "that they have lost certain papers referring to the firm; the clerk who had, or was supposed to have charge of them, was mad."

"Gridley never was mad!" exclaimed the weaver,

striking his stick upon the ground ; " I don't believe a word of it."

" Humph ! I don't exactly know what to say to that," replied the officer, doubtfully ; " it must have been a weighty consideration to have induced Mr. Crab to lend himself to anything wrong ; his is a model establishment."

" May be."

" Now," continued Marjoram, coaxingly, " I have always thought that you knew something of the manner in which I was robbed of those papers : perhaps you have them, or can put me on the track. Do so, and I'll make your fortune."

" May be I do, and may be I don't," replied Tim ; " but whatever I know I shall keep to myself ; so good day."

Tim rose from the tombstone with a resolute air, and slowly walked from the churchyard.

" A difficult fellow to deal with," muttered the officer, with an air of spite ; " but I shall be too much for him yet. I am determined to obtain those papers—I am sure there is money to be made of them. I'll get to the bottom of this mystery yet."

The speaker generally kept his word, for he was a shrewd man, and will long be remembered as the best detective in Manchester.

The morning after the funeral of Simon Gridley, Mr. Crab awoke with his usual pain and oppression about the head.

The repetition of the feeling began seriously to alarm him, and as soon as he was dressed, he sent for Dr. Chinon, who instantly obeyed the summons, but entered the apartment this time without the specific green draught which hitherto he had constantly brought with him.

"Ah, doctor," sighed his employer, "still these infernal pains and heaviness about the brain. If I were not the most temperate man in the world, and had not every confidence in your skill, I should almost fear an attack of apoplexy."

"Not unlikely," coolly replied the Frenchman.

"Good God!" exclaimed Crab, turning suddenly pale, "you don't mean to say there is any danger?"

"*Not for the moment!*"

"Where is the draught—it is astonishing what good it does me."

"Before we proceed to talk of draughts," said the man of science, "we have a little account to settle—our wager—you remember it?"

"Yes."

"Well, poor Gridley is dead!"

"Why, doctor, you can't for a moment imagine that I was serious!" began Mr. Crab, in one of his blandest tones. "A thousand pounds! I never wagered such a sum in my life. Ridiculous! Still," he added, "as you have had a great deal of extra trouble, and as some allusion certainly did occur respecting a bet, I have no objection to pay you a hundred pounds by way of let-off."

"You are very liberal!" observed his accomplice, with a sneer.

"I have always been so," said Mr. Crab, with an air of pious satisfaction.

"You have made your offer?"

"Yes."

"Now, then, hear mine," replied the doctor. "Do you think that I was fool enough to trust the word of a man whom I know to be dishonest, false, and deceitful?"

"Sir! these words are actionable."

"Hear me out. Knowing with whom I had to deal, I took one little precaution to bind you to fulfil your compact. You smile. I have no fear of your hesitating when you hear what it is. The white draught which you took last is exactly the same as the one which I have been administering to Gridley, and the green one which you *are* to take is the only remedy on earth capable of counteracting its effects. What think you," added the speaker, with a bitter sneer, "of my precaution now?"

A cold perspiration came over Mr. Crab as, with terrible distinctness, the cunning man of science explained to him how completely he was within his power. Death was actually at work within his veins—the pressure which he felt upon his brain nothing less than a premonitory symptom of apoplexy; the colour forsook his cheek, and he sat gazing in hopeless terror upon the man who was absolutely master of his life.

"You jest?" he faltered at last.

"I never jest," continued the surgeon, "at least not on such subjects. I repeat," he added, slowly and earnestly, "that, without the antidote, in four-and-twenty hours you will be a corpse."

"And you a murderer," groaned Crab.

"Psha! there are no murders in science—my reputation will remain unstained. I shall take the same precautions as I did with Gridley; an inquest—your body will be duly examined—the same scientific experiments which so interested you in this case performed upon your brain—your mutilated remains will be boxed up—and all will be over."

"Stay!" gasped the trembling wretch, "I'll pay the thousand pounds."

"I was sure you would."

"There," hastily added his employer, going to his desk and writing, "there is a cheque for the amount."

Chinon carefully read it over, and took up his hat to leave the room.

"Where are you going?"

"To the bank."

"And leave me here?" demanded Crab, bursting into tears; "the draught—for heaven's sake the draught—the money is sure to be paid."

"*When it is paid*—not till then," replied the cold, calculating Frenchman, once more moving towards the door.

By a private arrangement with the bank, it was

understood that no cheque of Mr. Crab's above a hundred pounds was to be paid without a letter of advice from the drawer.

Crab *suddenly recollected* this, and called to the doctor to return.

"I have forgotten something," he faltered.

"I thought so," observed Chinon, with a quiet chuckle; for he either knew or suspected the existence of some such arrangement.

"There—make haste, and return directly—don't fail—pray don't fail," imploringly added the guilty, terrified head of the *model establishment*; "I shall be in a fever till I see you again."

His tormentor coolly nodded his head, as much as to say, "I'll be with you," and left the room.

One, two, three hours passed, and still the doctor did not make his appearance—and fortunately for him he did not; for Mr. Crab had arranged a cell for his reception as soon as he returned, where, by the assistance of his faithful keeper, Barnes, he would soon have made him disgorge his spoil, after he had administered the saving draught. The entire scheme was admirably planned, but the astute little Frenchman was not to be outwitted, even by so knowing a hand as his employer.

Messengers were despatched in all directions—the keepers even sent out to make inquiries; while their master continued to pace the limits of his study in an agony of terror, such only as the condemned wretch

can be supposed to experience on the night which precedes the execution of his doom.

"I am a dead man!" he kept moaning to himself, I am a dead man! Oh, if I only escape this time, I will live better for the future."

All villains say the same.

The door at last opened, and Barnes appeared.

"Well," gasped his master, "have you found him?"

"No."

"Has he been to the bank?"

"Yes, and drawn the money," said the fellow, with a grin; for even he, devoted as he was to his employer, could not help smiling at so excellent a joke as his being outwitted.

There was another knock at the door—the second keeper arrived.

"The doctor has gone by express train to London, sir."

Crab heard no more; terror overcame him: and he was removed to his bed in a state of insensibility.

Could mental agony and the anticipation of death have atoned for long years of heartless cruelty, Crab would have paid the debt due to offended justice in full.

For four-and-twenty hours he did nothing else but rave and pray, blaspheme and implore assistance by turns.

From the profession he dared not implore it—his crimes compelled him to be silent as to the cause of his illness; confidence would have condemned him.

Besides, he knew the fearful skill of the Frenchman, and was hopeless of baffling it.

On the second day a packet arrived ; it inclosed a phial of the green mixture, with the following laconic note—

“ You are a great villain, but I cannot descend to hate you. I have kept my word, although you would have broken yours. By the time this reaches you, I shall be in France.”

The letter was without signature, but Crab knew the handwriting, and felt that he was saved ; the agitation to which he had so long been a prey gave way to tears of joy—nay, almost of gratitude, to his partner in crime.

Eagerly he drained the draught to the last drop, and sank soon afterwards into a deep sleep.

When he awoke in the morning, every symptom of oppression was gone, but it was long, very long, before he recovered his strength. The shock his system had received was greater than even the man of science had calculated.

with Messrs. Grindem and Co. would have rendered their absence remarkable.

One or two dissenting ministers were likewise invited ; for Small was a trustee and treasurer to several of their charities, and politically embraced the occasion of giving himself importance in their eyes.

It was about five o'clock when the party assembled in the dining-room. The host had previously introduced Grindem to his friends as they arrived, who received them with an indistinct murmur, something between "Happy to see you" and the groans of a muzzled bear.

And he was muzzled—that rich, cold, selfish man, who had consigned his victim to the grave, robbed both the living and the dead, and lived to count the sum for which he sinned as but an unimportant item in his colossal fortune—was the slave of the thing he for so many years had treated as a menial. The drudge had become the taskmaster, and the taskmaster the drudge.

He who had never felt either gratitude or affection for any human being, save his nephew, whom his folly had driven from his side when he most needed his support, was compelled to profess both for the man whom he most hated in the world—for the tool who had outmanœuvred him—how else account for his equal position in the firm? Worse than all, too, he was expected to wear a smile upon his lip, and gulp down the gall and bitterness which overflowed his heart.

"Ha, Banks, my boy, how are you?" exclaimed Small, to a tall, well-dressed, bilious-looking man, who was a great aristocrat *off Change*. There, from the nature of his business, he was frequently obliged to discount largely, and sometimes solicit forbearance of his correspondents.

He had many transactions with the firm; their importance had hitherto secured him the favour of dealing with Grindem himself, and consequently dispensing with the agency of Small, whom he had on more than one occasion piqued by coolly declining his invitations, and something very like the cut direct off Change, where, as a matter of business, he was compelled to know every one who frequented it.

It was not the least of Small's triumphs to see him broken in at last, as he called it.

"You look quite bilious," he observed maliciously. "No bad news from America, I trust?"

"None—none," replied the gentleman, with an effort to look unconcerned at the familiarity which shocked him.

"So much the better. It's the weather, I dare say. *At our age we begin to feel it!* Though, everything considered, you do look remarkably well. Mrs. Small, Mr. Banks, my dear," he added, introducing him to the lady.

The usual bowing and curtseying took place.

"Fact is, Grindem," he repeated aloud, knowing how the familiarity would humble the one, and the

observation mortify the other, "*Banks does wear well.*"

To tell a man in society that he wears well is very like telling him that he is an impostor; that he goes abroad with a mask, or has defrauded Time by some peculiar process.

To say how young Mr. So-and-So looks, is very like asserting that he is really old; and poor Banks, who was a bachelor, and a *ci-devant* young gentleman, was annoyed accordingly, as Small intended he should be.

"Mr. William Bowles," exclaimed the host, "I am delighted to see you. Grindem," he said, "Mr. Bowles."

A pang shot through the old merchant's heart as he kindly grasped the extended hand.

It was the friend of his nephew.

Small observed the cordiality of the reception, and it was a drop of gall in the cup of his intoxicating triumph.

Some days previous to the dinner, he had met William at a party, and eagerly seized the occasion to invite him.

It was part of Mrs. Small's politics, as well as her husband's, that he should be invited. She had her own cards to play, and was perfectly capable, especially at the *game of intrigue*.

Dinner was announced by the new boy in livery—for Small had, without much difficulty, yielded to the suggestions of his wife and daughters.

Grindem smiled bitterly when he saw the fellow, who was a fat, overgrown country lout. He was dressed, with singular good taste, by his partner, in the same livery as his own servants; doubtless, the little man thought that in becoming a full partner, he had the right to share in all the honours of the firm.

The dinner, as may be supposed, was a dull, heavy affair, where so many persons were assembled without the slightest sympathy existing between them.

Grindem, as the lion of the party, was placed at the right hand of the lady of the house, between herself and eldest daughter. One or two of the old ladies—for no young ones had been invited by the prudent mother—smiled significantly, as if they understood the arrangement.

Dinner over, Mr. Small rose, with the air of a man who prides himself as the hero of the day—if not the hero, he was at least the conqueror, for he had subdued his hitherto indomitable partner; and that, when the character of the old merchant is considered, was no trifling achievement.

The company were all attention as, after the usual preliminary hems, he commenced his speech, the result of the previous day's meditation.

"Gentlemen," he began.

"The *governor* is going it," whispered Matthew to his friend—for each of the sons had been permitted to invite one on the occasion.

"Silence, silence! Hear, hear!"

Mrs. Small took out her handkerchief—it was edged with genuine Valenciennes, and it was an admirable occasion of displaying, at the same time, her lace and her sensibility.

"Gentlemen," resumed their host, "this is indeed a proud and happy moment—an oasis in the desert of life"—he had copied the last expression from Byron—"to see around me so many true, sincere, and valued friends assembled at my humble board, in honour of an event which—which—"

Here the speaker hesitated.

"No one can understand," thought William Bowles to himself.

"Crowns my hopes," whispered Mark, who, from having heard his father rehearse his speech, recollected what should follow.

"Crowns my hopes," continued the speaker. "It is in honour of this event that I have assembled those who respect me, and whom I respect, around me; but there is one amongst you to whom I am peculiarly indebted for unwearied and generous kindness, whose honourable conduct as a merchant"—

"Hear, hear!"

Brown was silent; he remembered the various discounts he had paid.

"Whose heart, as a man, has secured him the love and esteem of all who have the happiness of knowing him."

"Who the devil can he mean?" thought Bowles.

"Hear, hear!" again repeated the guests, for the champagne had somewhat thawed them.

"Whose kindness to me and my boys, and regard to my family, has been as unostentatious as it is sincere."

"That's too strong," thought the three hopeful scions of the new partner. Mrs. Small wiped her eyes, and the eldest daughter tried to look as if the observation applied in some peculiar manner to herself.

"These feelings have induced him to reward my services, which have been neither unrelaxing nor interested"—

"Hear, hear!"

"By admitting me to an equal share in the house, which will be conducted for the future, as it ever has been, upon those enlarged and liberal views which none so well know how to carry out as the British merchant. Gentlemen, when I first entered the firm, my position was a very humble one"—

"Shoeblack," muttered Bowles, to himself.

"But I glory in it—it is my pride and honour; I am not, I trust, a vain man; but if there is one thing of which I am vain, it is my use in the firm I so long and faithfully served."

A round of cheers enabled the orator to recover his breath, and finish his glass of wine.

"I will not detain you longer, but at once name the gentleman whose health I am about to propose—we all know his virtues, generosity and liberality"—

This was rather too strong. Grindem winced, and looked devilish uncomfortable.

"In a bumper, gentlemen, the health of Gilbert Grindem, Esq.—God bless him, and long life to him."

The cheers at the termination of Mr. Small's address were really very respectable. Matthew, Mark, and John, with their three friends, made a terrific row, hip, hip, huzzaing.

The unhappy old man, the object of this bitter mockery—for to him it was one—bowed round the table, and bit his quivering lips to repress the emotion he could not but feel. To him every word the triumphant villain had uttered was an insult.

As soon as the cheering and clinking of the glasses had subsided, the company remained silent, and sat with their eyes turned upon Grindem, expecting, of course, the usual return of thanks—the set speech on such occasions.

Small saw his partner's embarrassment, and his little heart swelled with joy at the pangs which he knew were rending him. Grindem's breast, for a few seconds, rose and fell with contending passions, like a miniature earthquake. He felt that it was necessary to say something, *and he did so.*

"Gentlemen," he began, "you must allow for the poetical fancy of our friend Mr. Small, who has thought proper to deck me in more virtues than perhaps ever fell to the lot of any one man—virtues, I feel I am very far from possessing."

"Not at all, Grindem," echoed Small.

"Hear, hear!" cried William Bowles.

His host fixed his eyes upon the friend of Henry Beacham, but the young man met his gaze so firmly, that he was compelled to drop them.

"At least," resumed the speaker, "*I fully appreciate* the eulogy of my new partner, and the *motives* which have induced him thus to distinguish me."

Here the old man's glance at his tormentor was so vindictive that he quailed beneath it.

"For his services I have made him a partner in the firm of which I have so long been the head: his devotion to its interests required no less, and I trust he may live to enjoy his advancement in life till he has worn out the virtues which procured it. And you, gentlemen, who know his heart and its qualities, can judge how long that will be."

"Hear, hear!" shouted the sons.

But their father's countenance was pale with mortification, for he perfectly understood the concealed irony of Grindem's speech, although there was nothing in it but what seemed complimentary.

"I shall now conclude by proposing his health, and that of his interesting family; may they all resemble their father in his virtues, and may that father's end be worthy of his life."

The speaker sat down with the air of a man who had just got rid of some portion of the bile which was choking him.

The health of Mr. Small was drunk with the usual accompaniment of cheers and honours.

Many thought the terms in which it had been proposed not a little singular, and William Bowles could not avoid whispering to his neighbour, Brown, that he considered them decidedly equivocal.

"Very," replied the *ci-devant* young man; "but not more so than the virtues of the subject of them."

Many healths were given, and the usual routine of speech-making followed. Each of the young Smalls proposed his friend's health, who, to use an Americanism, reciprocated; but the only circumstance of the evening worthy of notice while the company remained in the dining-room, was William Bowles being called upon for a toast, or health. Although as modest a fellow as any of his age, he could not avoid feeling rejoiced at the occasion.

"Gentlemen," he began, in a firm, manly voice, "there is one toast which it would be unpardonable to omit—one individual whom it is only necessary to name in order that he should be remembered; for his virtues and generous qualities are familiar to all who know him."

"Hear, hear!"

"Who can he mean?" wondered the three Smalls, while their mamma looked offended, for she expected that the next toast would have been "the ladies."

"It is the companion of my boyhood and manhood, the nephew of the honoured guest whose health we first

drank this evening. Though absent he is not forgotten—at least by me; and I propose that we drink the safe return and happiness and prosperity of Henry Beacham.”

All but the Smalls drank the toast with warmth, for Henry was generally known and liked.

Matthew Small, remembering the kicking he had received on the occasion of his insulting Amy Lawrence, sat uneasily upon his chair, and with his usual good taste turned down his glass, not to do honour to the man he hated. The rest of the family drank it.

Grindem extended his hand from the back of his chair, and cordially grasped that of William. Strange for him, his eyes were filled with tears, and his voice trembled as he whispered—

“Thank you, thank you.”

“Suppose,” said Small, rising, and fixing a threatening glance upon his partner, as much as to say, “Contradict me, if you dare!” “I propose an amendment to the toast.”

“An amendment!” repeated several.

“By adding the health of Mrs. Henry Beacham and the ladies.”

All were astonished; but the toast was drank, and Mrs. Small, taking up the cue her lord and master had given, adroitly added—

“I suppose, by this time, Mr. Grindem, he is married?”

The old merchant was about to reply, when he again

caught the eye of Small, and, despite his doggedness, he hesitated to give the lie to his assertion: he had found his master, and he knew it.

"I suppose—at least, I believe so."

Small's brow unbent, and poor Bowles was completely mystified.

"And who has my friend married?" he demanded, addressing his hostess with an incredulous smile; for he could not—would not—believe his friend capable of such treachery to the poor orphan Amy.

"The daughter of Mr. Villiers, the agent of the firm at St. Petersburg—an only child, and not a bad match. We had some thought at one time of her for Matthew; but he has fixed his affections, it would seem, elsewhere."

Although this was a lie, it was so plausibly uttered, and tacitly acknowledged by Mr. Grindem, that William's doubt began at last to be shaken.

The ladies soon afterwards withdrew to the drawing-room, to receive the expected guests who had been invited only to the evening party, and the gentlemen remained to finish their wines.

Despite his wish to retire, Gilbert Grindem was obliged by the *peculiar* persuasive eloquence of his partner's eye, to make his appearance in the drawing-room, where Mrs. Small and her daughters were seated to receive the company, which began to arrive rapidly.

The eldest Miss Small was seated at the new

piano, playfully turning over the leaves of her song-book.

Her mother no sooner saw her destined victim make his appearance, leaning on the arm of her husband, than she pounced upon him, and insisted upon his taking a seat by her daughter at the instrument.

Nobbs, the fat footboy, who had been elevated to the dignity of a footman for the occasion, was posted on the landing-place, in the pride of his new livery. He and the housemaid had been duly drilled during the preceding day: the latter was placed at the bottom of the stairs to announce the visitors, and Nobbs to call out their names as they entered the drawing-room.

"Mind," said the lady of the house, who, despite her instructions, had certain misgivings, "that you do not omit to call out a single name—loud, distinctly, as if you were used to it."

"Never fear, missus," grinned the boy; "I'll call un loud enough."

"Do you play?" groaned Grindem to the young lady at the piano, feeling that he must say something.

"A little," she replied, trying to blush and holding down her head.

"And sing?"

"Yes."

"She is so timid," observed the watchful mamma, who overheard the question; "but I am sure she will *oblige you*. Sing, my love, that last song I taught you. I never—that is, very seldom—sing myself, unless to

instruct my girls, who have all such souls for music. Such treasures," she added, in a loud whisper, "such treasures, Mr. Grindem: he who wins the heart of my child will be a happy man—no frivolity—all heart—serious—good. I ought to be a very grateful woman."

"No doubt," sighed the merchant, who sincerely wished her at the bottom of the Red Sea.

"Mr. and Mrs. Spinks?" roared out Nobbs.

Several of the ladies smiled—the fellow's voice was like a boatswain's.

Mrs. Small smirked to her friends, and frowned at the boy.

He thought he had not been loud enough, and resolved to do better next time. He had not long to wait: putting his hand to his mouth, he shouted—

"'Poticary and Missus Gaskin!"

This time the titter became general, and his mistress's nods and frowns increased.

"I can't do it no louder," grumbled Nobbs, "not if I break my bellows."

The preliminary silence having been called for Miss Small's song, the lady, after murdering the prelude, to which her mamma beat time, commenced, in a thin, cracked voice, her favourite song.

Where, from inability to execute, she would otherwise have slurred a passage, Mrs. Small—who was gifted with a voice something between the scream of a peacock and the gobble of a turkey—threw in a few notes to assist her.

When first a blushing belle from school,
Mamma resolved to bring me out—

“ Captain Barker !” roared Nobbs.

Armed with my grandam's sapient rule,
I ventured to the brilliant rout.
Beaux thronged around—and in the dance
Of Italy or graceful France—
On all around Love's war I waged :
But in that war remembered still
’Twas waste of glances, time and skill,
To flirt with one engaged—
To flirt with one engaged.

“ *Old* and young Mrs. Harelip !”—it should have been Hareslip.

Mrs. Small began to get in a fever, for the announcements of the unfortunate footboy were evidently becoming the amusement of her friends.

“ I can't go on—do, mamma, tell Nobbs to be silent,” whispered her daughter.

Red with passion, Mrs. Small rose from her seat and walked towards the door.

The lad, thinking he was not loud enough, roared out with redoubled force the name of the party whom he saw enter the hall below. Unfortunately it happened to be a person sent from the fishmonger's, with some things for the supper.

“ Nobbs,” said his mistress, severely.

“ *The man with the hysters !*” he shouted, “ and I can't call no louder if I lose my place, missus.”

The universal laugh of the company proved how

keenly they enjoyed the *contretemps*; it was impossible even for the most serious to preserve their gravity.

Overcome with mortification, the lady boxed the poor lad's ears, while her daughter burst into tears,—the game of gentility was played.

The next day "*the man with the hysters*," was the cant phrase in Manchester.

As William Bowles was hastening home, at a later hour than he intended—for the scene which we have just described had both amused and detained him—he was struck by the appearance of a man, wrapped in an old great coat, who begged to speak with him for a few minutes.

"I have no time now," said the young man. "There is a shilling for you."

"Mr. Bowles," said the fellow, "it's not money I want of you—it's your advice."

"You know me, my good man?"

"Yes, and your friend, Mr. Henry Beacham, too."

The name of his friend at once arrested his attention—anything which concerned the interests of Henry touched himself. Looking down at the person who had so strangely accosted him, he recognised him as a porter in the house of Grindem and Small.

"And what is it you have to say to me?" he demanded.

"I dare not speak to you here, so close to the house. If you would only step on one side, I am sure you would not repent it."

"Follow me to the Royal," said Bowles; "we can converse quietly there. I shall not return to Burnley to-night."

"All right, sir."

The speaker stepped on the opposite side of the way, so that if either he or William encountered any person who knew them, they might not be noticed as being together.

"Well, my man," said William, as soon as they were seated in the private room where he and Henry Beacham had so often passed the evening together, "what do you want with me?"

"I want to consult you, sir."

"Well, I am ready."

"Ah, but you must promise not to betray me; for, if you should, Mr. Small would turn me out of my situation—indeed, he threatened to do so only this morning—the upstart! and all because I was ten minutes too late."

"I promise you faithfully that if, through any communication you make to me, you lose your place in their employ, I will take you into mine."

"Then I'll speak out. Young Matthew Small has robbed the firm!"

"Robbed the firm!" repeated Bowles.

"And I can prove it," said the man.

"Stay," observed William, taking out his memorandum-book, and preparing to write; "this is serious. What is your name, my good man?"

"My name is Pike—John Pike: but don't write till I have done. I shall never be able to tell you, if you take down what I say."

Like most of the ignorant and uneducated, he thought there was something dangerous in having his words taken down.

"Go on, my man," said Henry's friend, at the same time closing his memorandum-book.

"Young master is at St. Petersburg."

"Yes, yes, I know that."

"I must tell it my own way," observed Pike, "or I can't tell it at all. Well, sir, I found this letter in young Matthew Small's great-coat pocket. He ordered me to brush it yesterday; and when I told him I was not hired to brush the clerk's coats, he kicked me out of the office."

"But you did brush it?"

"I *did*, or how should I have found the letter? Read it?"

It was the letter which contained the notes which Grindem had sent to Henry Beacham, and given to Matthew Small to post; but which that hopeful youth, trusting to his father's influence over his partner, had appropriated to his own private purposes.

"The letter," observed William, after he had carefully read it, "may never have been intended to be sent—that is, the writer may have altered his mind."

"No, he didn't."

“How can you possibly tell that?”

“Because I looked in the letter-book in Mr. Grindem's room this morning, when sent to dust it out to receive the lawyer and the gentlemen, and found it entered, ‘Letter to Henry Beacham, £500.’”

“The same date?”

“The same date.”

“And in Mr. Grindem's handwriting?” demanded William Bowles

“No, sir, in Matthew Small's.”

The circumstance certainly began to look very suspicious, as far as the last-named gentleman was concerned; but Henry's friend, conscious of the interest he took in proving, if possible, to Grindem that he had been robbed and deceived by the Smalls, felt almost doubtful of himself.

“This must be inquired into,” he observed. “Perhaps Mathew Small may be able to explain?”

“No, he can't,” interrupted Pike, with a chuckle; “for he has spent the money.”

“How do you know?”

“I'll tell you, sir. I was some evenings since at the tap of the Royal—this very house—taking my pint of beer, when Mr. Springer—that's the brother of the head waiter—comes down in a great passion, cursing and swearing like a trooper.”

“‘What's up?’ says I. ‘I've been knocked down,’ says he. ‘Who by?’ says I. ‘Matthew Small,’ says he. ‘I'm as good a man as he is, if I don't wear so

fine a coat, or carry a *hundred pound note* in my pocket.' "

"But what does this prove?" demanded William, who began to tire of the narrator's prolixity.

"You shall hear, sir; I knew Matthew Small couldn't have *sich a think* as a hundred pound note of his own, so I began chaffing Springer, and told him it was only a flash one; and what do you think was his reply?"

"I don't know."

"Flash one or not, master has changed it.' "

"Enough, my good fellow," said Bowles; "you have acted the part of an honest man, and shall not go unrewarded. If anything occurs that you should lose your situation, come to me, and you shall have employment at the same wages."

"Thank you, sir," said Pike; "I should like to go at once; I can't bear to see that upstart a full partner: he was once no better than myself."

"Poor humanity!" thought his listener. "After all, the seeming disinterested honesty of this man is as much prompted by jealousy and envy as by principle."

But he kept his opinion on the subject to himself.

"Come to me in the morning, and we will think about it," he answered; "and, in the meantime, leave this letter to me."

The man hesitated.

"I will give you ten pounds," added the speaker.

The porter's salary was only eighteen shillings per

week—for everything was conducted on a most economical scale in the office of Grindem and Company; he, too, had been more than human had he resisted it. Probably he had never before been master of so much money. The sum was counted out, and the letter safely deposited in William Bowles's pocket.

"Take no notice of the affair to any human being," he said.

"Certainly not, sir."

"And let me know if anything particular occurs in the firm: of course, I don't mean business matters. I shall, before taking any proceedings, write to Mr. Beacham, and follow his instructions how to act."

"You may rely upon me. Good night, sir; if anything good turns up for Mr. Henry, I shall be so glad: he is a real gentleman, and not one of your upstarts, like Matthew Small. He never kicked an old servant out of the office for refusing to brush his coat—not he."

"Good night."

The porter walked to the door, reached it, and then retraced his steps close to the table where Bowles was sitting.

Striking his knuckles on the table, he exclaimed—

"Hang him, if you can, sir—hang him. I am a poor man, but I would give back the ten pounds, and a month's wages to boot, to be revenged on that Matthew Small."

With this emphatic declaration Mr. Pike left the Royal Hotel.

Bowles remained for some time reflecting how to act.

From what had passed at the dinner, he felt convinced that some extraordinary influence had been used to induce Grindem to concede an equal share in the firm to his subordinate; a man whom he had seen him treat with a degree of contempt which amounted to brutality.

The announcement, also, of the marriage of his friend, uncontradicted by the uncle, puzzled him. He knew not what to think.

That foul play had been practised somewhere, he felt convinced; and, for Henry Beacham's sake, he determined to find it out.

His first object was, if possible, to obtain possession of the note.

"Without that," he muttered, "exposure will be useless."

With this resolution he made the best of his way to the private bar, where the landlord was sitting with one or two commercial travellers.

From his affability, William Bowles was always welcome to a seat and a cigar in the sanctum of the worthy Boniface, who received him with a friendly nod, and "You are late, sir."

"Yes," replied the young man. "I have just left Small's party."

"Grand set-out?"

"Very. By-the-by, can you oblige me with such

a thing as a note for a hundred pounds for my cheque. I shall require one in the morning before banking hours."

"All right, sir."

The landlord opened his cash-box, looked over his notes, and threw across the table one for the sum required.

"You are fortunate," he observed; "it's the only one I've got."

"It's a good one, I suppose?"

"Good!" repeated the landlord, "good as the bank. I had it from young Matthew Small—you will see his name upon the back of it. I never take anything over ten but I make my customers indorse it, and put my own private mark upon it."

"You could swear to it, then?" observed William.

"That I could," replied the man, with a look of surprise at the observation, "if I did not see it for ten years to come."

Bowles looked at the back of the note: it was a new one, and bore the name of "Matthew Small" indorsed at the back, as well as the initials "G. G." (Gilbert Grindem) in small letters at one of the corners.

With a smile of satisfaction he carefully put the note in his pocket, after giving his cheque for the amount.

"There is something up," observed the landlord to his commercial friends, as soon as the young man had left the bar. "William Bowles would not have made that observation for nothing. Mark my words—we shall hear of that note again!"

CHAPTER V.

Vice is a monster of such hideous mien,
That, to be hated, needs but to be seen ;
Familiar grown, accustomed to her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

MISS HANNAH HEARTLAND was a maiden lady, no longer of that uncertain age which the poets describe as preceding the last bloom—the tinge of the yellow on the autumnal leaf before it falls ; every trait of youth and grace had long disappeared from her sharp, peevish face.

Like most old maids, she had taken to piety as an occupation—not that pure and healthy religion which, like the dew of heaven, revives and expands the half-withered flower, but more resembling hoar frost, which crisps and contracts the feelings till they are centred in the small compass of self.

Like most of her class, she either had or affected to have, an insuperable aversion to marriage ; and as men ceased to pay her those attentions which are grateful at all ages to the sex, her bitterness against the deceitful race, as she termed them, increased.

With these feelings, it may naturally be supposed

that she regarded the attachment of her niece and William Bowles with anything but unmixed satisfaction. An orphan, left from early infancy under her guardianship, and that of a cousin, a rich old bachelor, Mary Heartland had been reared by her female relative, who had endeavoured to implant upon her youthful mind the same distastes and opinions—Mr. Majorbanks, who was merely the guardian of her fortune, very seldom, if ever, venturing to interfere. The shrewd old man was perfectly aware how soon the ice would melt when once in contact with the world and the generous sympathies of youth. Frequently he used to observe, with a smile, when his co-guardian would triumphantly point out the effect of her lessons and example :

“ Wait a little, cousin ; we shall see, we shall see.”

It was through the introduction of Mr. Majorbanks, that William, who was a great favourite with him, became acquainted with Mary.

As the old bachelor anticipated and wished, they soon fell in love, and the aunt was shocked at the levity, as she expressed it, with which her niece gave herself up to the idle passion ; the indelicacy of a preference astonished her ; and, but for the firm remonstrance of their mutual friend, the poor girl would not have been permitted to accept the invitation which Mrs. Bowles had given to pass a few weeks at Burnley.

A week after the dinner given by the Smalls, the old lady was seated in her drawing-room, reading a

sister of a late clerk in my husband's counting-house."

"Amy Lawrence?"

"Dear me," exclaimed the visitor, with a well-affected air of surprise; "how did you know her name? But I guess—you are so charitable."

"Not exactly as you suppose," replied Miss Heartland; "my niece, Mary, is on a visit to Mrs. Bowles, at Burnley, and she is quite fascinated with the girl."

Mrs. Small was quite shrewd enough to perceive the tone of spleen and mortification with which the aunt spoke of her niece's friend, and it encouraged her to proceed.

"Ah, youth, youth, how easily led astray. More follies have been committed from the influence of improper friendships than the world imagines. Not that I mean to speak against Miss Lawrence; she is a very pretty girl, and *may* be a good one—at least I hope she is; but who can judge?—the world is so deceitful. Would you believe it, my dear Miss Heartland, when I called upon her to propose that she should make my house her home, till Small or I could place her in some respectable position in the world, she refused, and not in the very civilest terms, to avail herself of my protection."

"Her hopes," said the old maid, "point higher."

"I know," said her visitor, with a smile, "to young William Bowles; but surely his parents will never be so mad as to consent to such a preposterous match."

"You are mistaken."

"Oh, dear! no; I know that he has long been attached to her."

Miss Heartland drew her chair nearer to Mrs. Small, in the most confidential manner. The hope of hearing something to break off her niece's match was delightful—something to prove to Mary, the world, and that odious Mr. Majorbanks, that she was right—her warnings true; that men were all alike, and not one of them to be trusted.

"Attached to Miss Lawrence!" she repeated. "Are you quite sure my dear Mrs. Small? It has been represented to me that she is engaged to Mr. Henry Beacham, William Bowles's friend—not that I believed it—no, no!"

Mrs. Small drew from her reticule a newspaper—it was the *Times* of the preceding day—and pointed to the lady a paragraph which announced the marriage of Henry Beacham, Esquire, with the daughter of the correspondent of the firm of Grindem and Small, at St. Petersburg.

"Is it possible? What deceit!"

"More than possible—it is true." (The speaker had written the paragraph herself.) "Mr. Beacham went out for the very purpose. My husband and his uncle intend, if he conducts himself properly—which I very much doubt, for by all accounts he is a sad libertine—to establish him there as a sort of under-agent for the house. But you look surprised," she added.

CHAPTER V.

How oft will envy's breath harsh discord blow
Between two loving hearts ; interpret looks
As innocent as angels' smiles to mischief,
And sunder bonds which Heaven had seemed to knit.

THAT very same afternoon poor Amy Lawrence was standing alone at the window of the drawing-room at Burnley, when William entered.

He had just returned from Manchester ; his countenance was flushed, and it was evident, even to a casual observer, that something had occurred to disturb the usual happy serenity of his mind.

"Thank Heaven," he murmured to himself, as Amy turned round, and smilingly extended her hand to him ; "she has not seen it."

He alluded, of course, to the announcement of Henry Beacham's marriage in the *Times*—not that he believed it. Still he knew the effect that such a piece of intelligence must have upon her susceptible nature.

His satisfaction, however, was quickly changed to terror, when he discovered the fatal journal in her hand.

"Oblige me with the paper, Amy?" he exclaimed.

"Willingly," said the fair girl, with an air of surprise. "I have almost done with it. But have you seen Mary?"

"Not yet."

"What!" she playfully continued, "ask for the newspaper before you have seen her! For shame, sir! Go directly, or I shall begin to doubt your love for the sweet girl, despite your protestations, sighs, and vows. Oh, you men."

"I shall see her directly. But pray give me the paper."

"Not till I have finished the marriages."

"I must have it."

"Must! Must, indeed! A pretty word from the lips of a gentleman."

Suddenly struck by his agitated countenance, she added—

"Forgive me—there is something in it you do not wish me to see."

"No, no."

"I am sure of it, William. The anticipations of the heart seldom deceive."

The next instant the fatal paragraph caught her eye.

No shriek, no groan escaped her; but like a delicate flower, whose support is suddenly withdrawn, her head sank upon her breast, and she would have fallen had not William sprung forward and caught her in his arms.

"Amy," he exclaimed, "sister—friend—dear Amy, it is false. I'll pledge my life on Henry's truth. He loves but you. It is impossible he should be the heartless scoundrel that paragraph would make him. Believe a life of honour—renounce his love! Amy, look up and listen to me."

The suffering girl burst into a violent flood of tears, and placing her hand upon her heart, as if to control its agony, murmured—

"Broken—broken!"

"Listen to me," continued the young man. "I have already written to Beacham; wait a few days before you judge him—there is a mystery in all this. The Smalls are playing a game with the uncle; I do not understand the move at present, but I soon shall—I have already obtained one clue. Wait the reply: be calm till then."

"Calm! Oh, William—William—he was my childhood's love. Before I knew the nature of my feelings, my poor heart would beat when I heard his step—bound like a living thing at his dear voice. I worshipped him as woman worships the idol of her choice—gave him without reserve my love—and now, cast off, like a worthless thing, without one word—one little token of regret—to support me in my loneliness—one, one thought—one sigh"—

Overcome with the violence of the shock, the unhappy Amy found a momentary relief from the agony of her feelings in insensibility. Her head fell upon the

shoulder of the warm-hearted young fellow, whose eyes bore womanish testimony of his commiseration.

William Bowles would have been humiliated had any one seen a tear in his eye, for he was not less spirited than kindly in his nature; he almost blushed at his weakness as he thought of it.

He need not have done so—that tear was no dishonour to his manhood; such weakness is more beautiful than strength, and does greater honour to the heart than the stoic's coldness or the worldling's philosophy.

"Amy," he exclaimed, "it is no marriage; believe me, the report is false."

As he uttered these words the door of the drawing-room was opened—the speaker was too much occupied with attempting to soothe his unhappy burthen to notice it—and the face of Mary Heartland for an instant appeared.

At first it was full of smiles and generous confidence; she had been listening to her aunt's dilation, and, confident in her lover's honour and Amy's truth, had hastened to the drawing-room to inform them; for in her confiding nature she deemed it a treason to friendship to keep the slander, and her disavowal of all credence in it, a secret from them for one moment.

The scene she saw changed her warm heart to ice. She turned deadly pale, and, closing the door, returned to her aunt in the dining-room, as wretched and as much to be pitied as poor Amy.

"Take me home," she sobbed, as she threw herself upon the neck of her relative; "take me home, or I shall die."

"What has happened?" inquired the old maid, curiously.

"Don't ask me—pray don't ask me. Oh, William!—and I—I to have believed him."

Miss Heartland was too much delighted at her niece's sudden resolution, and too anxious to avoid an explanation—for she feared that whatever had occurred to excite Mary's feelings might be capable of one—to insist. Fortunately for her project, both Mr. and Mrs. Bowles were from home.

At this moment William knocked at the dining-room door.

"Mary," he cried, "Amy is ill—very ill; I am off for a surgeon. Go to her, my dear girl. I shall be back in half-an-hour."

Without waiting for a reply the speaker started off, little dreaming of the additional misery which would meet him on his return!

"Insolent!" said the old maid; "ask you to go to the creature."

"No," exclaimed her niece, with sudden resolution; "he shall not find me so tame-spirited as he imagines. In five minutes I will be ready, and leave this house for ever."

"Can I assist you, my love?" inquired the aunt.

Without waiting for a reply she followed the excited girl to her room.

At any other moment the old lady would have remonstrated on the untidy manner in which her niece thrust dresses, visites, ribands, and laces indiscriminately into her trunk.

The fact was, Mary feared her resolution would give way if she once more saw the man whom, despite his apparent falsehood, she still fondly loved.

In a very short time all was prepared. The various little presents William had made her were placed upon her dressing-table, and the astonished servant who answered her summons was directed to take the trunks to her aunt's carriage.

"Why, sure you are not going to leave us, miss?" inquired the honest fellow.

Mary could not reply.

"My niece returns with me," said Miss Heartland, in her stateliest manner; "and bitterly do I regret that I ever consented to her setting foot in such a house; but thank, Heaven, her eyes are opened at last."

The eyes of poor Mary could not under any circumstances have been opened wider than the domestic's at the speech of the old maid, as she pointed with her parasol to the things he was to take to the carriage. They were soon arranged, and the ladies seated ready to depart.

"Any message to my master or mistress," demanded the man, respectfully.

"None."

"Or to Mr. William?" added the poor fellow, in a tone of interest; for he had lived many years in the family, and seen quite enough to convince him how deeply his young master would feel this sudden departure.

"Home!" exclaimed Miss Heartland to the coachman, at the same time drawing up the window of the carriage; and the next instant it was rolling at a rapid pace along the lawn, which terminated in the high road leading to Manchester.

Poor William met the vehicle on his return from his errand of friendship, and was so astonished at seeing Mary on her way home with her aunt, that for a few moments he could neither speak nor stir. When he in some degree recovered from his surprise, it was too late.

Although an affectionate son, never had he seen his mother's kind, cheerful countenance with so much pleasure as when, about an hour after the occurrence above narrated, in company with his father, she returned home.

Giving her a hasty outline of what had occurred, and commending Amy to her care, he mounted his horse and galloped like a madman along the road to Manchester.

"Not at home, sir," said the servant, as William, his horse covered with foam, dashed up to Miss Heartland's door.

"I know better, my good fellow," answered the agitated lover, at the same time thrusting a sovereign into his hand. "Say to Miss Mary that I entreat to see her but for one moment."

"More than my place is worth," observed the man, pocketing the coin. "My young lady is ill—very ill. Doctor Currey has been sent for. We were obliged to lift her out of the carriage when she arrived. Good evening, sir."

"Stay—one word. Will you take a message from me?"

"I dare not."

"A note?"

"I should lose my place."

"I'll make that sovereign five?" added the distracted William.

The footman hesitated ; but the next instant he heard the voice of his mistress on the stairs, and prudence prevailed over temptation—he closed the door.

At that moment one of the grooms belonging to the Royal Hotel happened to pass ; to him William Bowles consigned his panting horse, and then continued to pace up and down the street more like a madman than a reasonable being.

Soon after the carriage of the physician drove up to the door.

To the affectionate heart of the distracted lover it seemed an age till he returned. He fancied a thousand things ; that Mary was ill—dying.

It never once occurred to him that she might have

witnessed the scene between him and Amy, and misinterpreted it, as really was the case.

Just as the Doctor, after visiting his patient, was about to enter his carriage, a hand was laid upon his arm.

The benevolent old man turned round, and saw to his astonishment that it was his young friend, William Bowles.

"Ah, William!" he exclaimed, "is that you? Heavens, how pale you look! My good boy, tell me what is the matter with you?"

"Never heed me; but say, how have you left that suffering angel? What has occurred? Is she really ill? If so, I will see her, despite fifty aunts."

"She is really ill," replied the physician.

The young man without another word sprang towards the door of the house, and was about to demand entrance in no very measured or courteous terms, when the skilful practitioner added—

"So ill that the least emotion may be fatal."

The upraised knocker fell from the hand which grasped it as though it had been of molten iron: he knew too well both the veracity and skill of the speaker to doubt either the truth of his assertion or the ground on which it was made.

Unable to master his emotion, William clasped his hand over his eyes to conceal the tears which, despite his efforts to hide them, trickled through his fingers.

"Come," said the physician, kindly, "the street is

no place for a scene like this. In my experience through life I have as often been called upon to administer to a mind diseased, as the poet hath it, as to a body. Get into the carriage and ride home with me. Once more I repeat," he added, "that I will not answer for the consequences if you should persist in your mad attempt to see my patient to-night."

These words were quite enough to induce the poor fellow to comply with the kind advice; as a child, docilely he entered the vehicle, and in a few minutes after was seated in the library of the Doctor, who, having attended him from his infancy, felt more than a common interest in his welfare.

"Tell me, William," he began, soothingly, "what is the cause of all this? I heard, while at Liverpool, something of an engagement between you and Mary Heartland, from my old friend Majorbanks. What has occurred?"

"I do not know. I left her this morning the best of friends. She even pressed my return, saying she should be lonely till she saw me again. She looked and smiled so like an angel, that I must have been worse than a devil to have given her cause of uneasiness."

"This is some lover's quarrel," observed the old man: "I felt convinced her illness was of the mind; and once I thought she murmured your name."

"Did she?" exclaimed William. "Bless her! God bless her! even though she should persist in her cruelty and break my heart. You spoke of a quarrel; how

could I quarrel with a being all gentleness and candour? Never, Doctor, from the moment I first loved her have I suffered my thoughts to wander to another?"

"Strange," observed Doctor Currey, musingly; "there must be some mystery in this."

"Some slander," observed William. "Her aunt came this afternoon to Burnley, and took her off whilst I was absent for Surgeon Whiting."

"Was she ill, then?"

"No; but another poor girl was; a friend of hers—one whom she loves like a sister; an orphan, whose heart has received a blow like that which is breaking mine."

"And you have given her no cause?"

"None, on my honour."

"Oh, this love, this love!" exclaimed the physician; "what a fortune would he make who could find a cure for it."

"But I have no desire to be cured," observed William, with a faint smile.

"I dare say not; few madmen ever suspect that they are ill; not that I pronounce love in all cases to be decided madness, although the symptoms are similar. You must not return to Burnley to-night; my groom shall ride over with a note to your father—not from me—that would alarm them—but from yourself; you will find pens and paper on the table beside you," added the master of the house; "so write, like a good boy, as rationally as you can, and then go to bed."

"Thank you; but I can sleep at the hotel."

"You will sleep here," said the Doctor. "Remember, I am absolute; you know my practice—implicit obedience from my patients, or I wash my hands of them: and although yours is not altogether a medical case, still it requires skilful treatment."

"You must be obeyed," replied the young man; "but if you should be summoned to her again, will you let me know? Promise me that, or I will walk all night before the house of her cruel aunt."

"And catch a fever," said his host.

"Better a fever of the blood, than of the heart."

"Perhaps you are right," observed the physician: "the former is more easily cured. Well, then, I promise you. But don't, if you hear the night-bell, be starting from your bed, imagining all sorts of improbable miseries. Remember, I have other patients besides Miss Mary Heartland."

His guest knew he could rely upon the promise of his kind-hearted host, and retired to bed, but not to sleep.

A thousand times did he review his conduct since he had become acquainted with Mary, and could find nothing to reproach himself with; for he had loved her with that purity, that singleness of heart which, when once the affections are engaged, knows no second object. Little did the poor fellow suspect that the very kindness of his nature had been the cause of his misfortune.

Poor William, and poor Amy!—both were equally

unconscious of the wound they had given—of the doubt which hung over them.

The next day Doctor Currey's report was sufficiently favourable to permit the lover to ride over to Burnley and inquire after Amy.

The orphan had so endeared herself both to Mr. and Mrs. Bowles by the gentle, unobtrusive kindness of her manners, and affectionate, grateful attentions, that her illness was a positive affliction to them.

Both the old people attributed the extraordinary departure of Mary to some caprice of her aunt's; and although they said but little, to avoid hurting the feelings of their son, they felt its unkindness at such a moment. What between Burnley and Manchester, poor fellow, he had but a sad time of it.

"Did you send Parkins the invoice?" demanded old Mr. Bowles, on one of his son's hurried visits.

"Yes, sir."

"He complains that he has not received it," observed his father, referring to a letter just opened.

"Then I could not have sent it."

The old gentleman was about to make one of his quiet, dry replies, when a look from his wife restrained him.

The mother's heart divined what was passing in her son's, and felt with it.

"I shall go to Manchester myself, William," said the father; "you have been overworked lately, and require a little relaxation."

The poor fellow could not speak, but he felt grateful.

Soon after he mounted his horse and rode to the house of Doctor Currey, who met him with a smile.

It was a good omen when the benevolent physician smiled ; many an anxious mother, husband, and friend, had felt a weight removed from their hearts when he did so.

“ Good news,” he said, shaking him by the hand warmly ; “ good news ! our little friend is better ; the fever is all but left her ; in fact, her heart is now more affected than her health, though that is still weak enough.”

“ And have you gleaned from her the cause of this unhappy illness ? ” demanded the lover, anxiously.

“ I can glean nothing,” exclaimed the doctor, with an impatient shrug ; “ when I question her, she only replies by tears, and her aunt pours forth an accompaniment of groans, and rails more bitterly against our sex than ever. The old lady is remarkably skilled in expletives, and uses them with surpassing liberality. I believe it would give her pleasure to write the epitaph of every male creature in creation.”

“ The milk of human kindness is curdled indeed in her,” observed William ; “ from the very first she was opposed to my love for her niece.”

“ Milk of human kindness ! ” repeated the old man, with a shrug ; “ don’t believe she ever had any—whey, all whey. Hang me, if I am quite certain whether

she properly belongs to the class mammalia. Naturalists are at fault ; there should have been a class set apart for all bachelors and old maids. But come," he added, "I am about to try an experiment upon the nerves of my patient this morning."

"An experiment!" repeated William, alarmed at the word. "Oh, be careful—pray be careful!"

The Doctor smiled.

"Should it not succeed?" continued the young man ; "or prove dangerous?"

"That will depend on my assistant. The aunt, I find, will be from home ; and I had some thoughts of allowing you to see her just for an instant ; but, as you say, Should it prove dangerous?"

The young man grasped his hand.

"I had better put it off, perhaps."

"Who can doubt your skill? Let me see her ; one word will explain this mystery, whatever its source. Pray, pray, take me with you—when the heart is diseased, the sight of those we love is worth a thousand physicians."

Probably the Doctor thought so, too ; for, after many cautions, and as many promises from William to control his feelings, it was finally arranged that the lover should accompany him in his visit to the patient.

The only difficulty to overcome was the opposition of the servants, which the old gentleman readily undertook ; indeed, so respected was he both in Liverpool and Manchester, that there were few who would venture

either to oppose or dispute his orders. He was as absolute as Abernethy.

Mary was seated, or rather reclining on the sofa in the drawing-room, when the practitioner entered.

Traces of severe suffering, both mental and bodily, were visible upon her pale cheeks, and her whole person presented that languor and debilitated appearance which shows the very springs of life are relaxed and weakened.

"Better—better," said Doctor Currey, after feeling her pulse; "change of air and a few tonics, and we shall soon bring back the runaway roses to your cheeks."

"Never," murmured the patient, with a faint smile.

"But I say yes. Besides, I have another stimulant to apply—society."

"I hate it."

"Not all? Is there no one whom you would wish to see—whose heart has been torn, like your own, by some frightful misconception, which a word or a look can perhaps explain?"

"No one—no one."

"Not William?"

Mary started. During her illness she had frequently thought that she should like to see him once more; not to listen to his vindication—that she believed to be impossible—but to forgive him, to wish that he might be happy, even though it should be with another.

"Come," said the physician, "I do not often interfere in love affairs; but really the poor fellow is so

wretched—he has been almost as ill as yourself. I know how susceptible the heart is when it loves. Sceptics say it is merely a forcing-pump to send the life-stream through the system. I wonder if the fools ever loved anything besides their own vain theories.”

“Yes,” exclaimed Mary, “I will see him, forgive him, and die.”

“Forgive him and be happy, like a good little sensible girl. Die! Pooh! nonsense! I intend to dance at your wedding.”

Here the Doctor coughed; it was the signal for William, who was waiting at the door of the drawing-room, to make his appearance.

The instant Mary beheld him, despite her resolution, she started from her recumbent position and tottered towards him, exclaiming—

“Don’t approach me, William—don’t touch me. You have broken my heart, but I forgive you—I forgive you!”

True to the instincts of her heart, and perfectly unconscious of what she was doing, how wide was the discrepancy between her words and actions; the poor suffering girl sank upon the manly breast of her lover in a flood of tears, murmuring, as her thin, wasted arm, like the tendril of some delicate vine, clung round his shoulders :

“Don’t come near me, William!” she sobbed.

“Mary—dear Mary! you have been deceived. What have I done—how forfeited your love? By

heavens ! could I lay my heart bare before you, you would only read its truth. If I have offended, let me at least know my crime. You are too generous to judge me unheard. If," he added, "I have lost your love—if you prefer another"—

"Another, William !" interrupted the indignant girl; "oh, never—never. You may—you will—despise me for the avowal, but, betrayed and insulted as I have been, never will another replace your image here. It is not I who have changed, but you."

Seeing that things were in a fair train for an explanation, Doctor Currey, who had watched the commencement of the interview with considerable anxiety, suddenly recollected that he wanted to consult a book in the library below, and left the lovers to themselves.

CHAPTER VII.

A word—and smiles succeed to tears;
A word—and the torn heart is healed.
Strange that such precious balm should fall
From air-drawn sounds whispered by human lips.

HERMIONE.

FOR a few seconds both William and Mary were deeply agitated: it was the first cloud which had shadowed their young love, and they felt it keenly.

The young man led the still trembling girl to the sofa, and seating himself beside her, whispered those tender words of consolation, which are doubly soothing when uttered by the lips that are dear to us.

“Tell me,” he exclaimed, “my own dear Mary—tell me what has occurred to wound your heart and torture mine; for, by Heaven, I am as innocent of wrong, or thought of wrong towards you, as the guardian angel who watches over you. There,” he added, seeing that from excessive emotion she was unable to reply to him, “there, lean your dear head upon my breast.”

“No, William—no,” sobbed she; “that right is another’s.”

"Another's!" repeated the astonished youth. "What other? Could you see my heart, you would not doubt my love. It hath bled at your unkind suspicion. Its every pulse beats for you; but I see," he added, "this is the doing of your jealous aunt. She never liked me: selfishly, she would form you like herself—wither the sympathies of nature.

It was a fortunate thing that Miss Heartland did not hear the speaker's just but not very flattering description of her: the breach would have been irreparable, and an additional impediment cast in the way of the lovers' mutual happiness; for, like most bigots, she never forgave.

"My aunt," said Mary, who had partially recovered her firmness, "told me you were false."

"I knew so," replied her lover, bitterly.

"That you loved another."

"Another?" said William. "In the name of fortune, whom?"

"Amy Lawrence."

"And you believed her?"

"No," replied Mary, with a fresh flood of tears, "I repelled the accusation with indignant scorn. I did not then think you capable of treachery. Had I died the moment after she had told me, it would have been with unbroken confidence, William, in your love and truth. Would I had—would that I had

"And is it possible that you now believe me false?" demanded the young man.

"I must believe the evidence of my senses. I left her in the dining-room to seek you and Amy, in the full confidence of your love and her friendship, to bring you to refute the slander—to tell you, in the presence of my aunt, that my heart disbelieved it. I opened the drawing-room door, and saw"—

"What?"

"Amy reclining in your arms, and heard your lips assure her that it was no marriage—*that there could be no marriage*; and—and—it broke my heart, William—broke it!"

Tears choked the poor girl's utterance—she was unable to proceed.

Her lover saw at once the cause of her distress, and deeply did he rejoice, in the manliness of his nature, how easily he should be enabled to remove it.

A weight was relieved from his breast—nay, he felt almost a joy at the unmistakable assurance of the devoted affection with which Mary regarded him; for it was no ephemeral passion which could have reduced a high-spirited girl like her almost to the grave, when she fancied that the object of it had proved himself unworthy.

"Have I not spoken truth, William?" she sighed.
"Did I not see you?"

"You did, Mary; but misunderstood us both. Oh, that I could through after-life remove every care and pain from your bosom as easily as I can this! How blest would be your lot, and mine, if you permitted me

to share it—to watch over you—to love you. But that permission,” he added, “is already mine, and you will never recall it.”

Mary was silent.

“Hear me,” continued the young man. “I must tell you that which will wound your generous nature, when you shall learn how cruelly it has deceived itself, I fear.”

“Oh, do not fear for me. I care not what I suffer, if it be possible that you can explain, or even deceive me into the belief that you are innocent.”

“There shall be no deceit in the question. There has never been any. I entered the drawing-room the instant I returned home.”

“I know—I know—and inquired for Amy, not for me—not for me.”

“You shall hear my reasons, and then judge them. I wished to prevent the poor girl, who has been almost as great a sufferer as yourself, from seeing an announcement in the paper, which I knew would strike her to the heart, as this unhappy misconception has stricken you, Mary. When I asked her for the *Times*, which she held in her hand, what think you was her reply?”

“I know not,” exclaimed the victim of jealousy, impatiently.

“Not till I had seen you. More, she reproached me playfully for unkindness. A thought struck her that there was something I wished to keep from her in the journal. She raised it, and her eyes fell upon the

fatal paragraph. The next instant she was insensible—half-dead within my arms.”

“And what was that paragraph?” demanded Mary, eagerly.

“The announcement of Henry Beacham’s marriage with another.”

Those only who have unintentionally wronged a friend or lover—misconstrued the words of affection—misjudged the heart devoted to their happiness—can understand the reproachful feelings of the warm-hearted girl, as she listened to the ample vindication of her lover and her friend.

She had punished the former for displaying the generous pity she should have admired, and absented herself from the latter at a moment when she required all the tender consolation of friendship—its sympathies and watchful care.

Fixing her tearful eyes upon her lover, she sobbed—

“Show me that paper: not that I doubt you, William—not that I doubt you; but I should like to see how cruel, how unjust I have been. Oh, forgive me—pray forgive me!”

Fortunately he had the journal with him in his pocket. Hastily drawing it forth, he was about to point out the fatal paragraph, when, animated by some sudden impulse, she snatched it from his hand, and tore it into a thousand pieces, exclaiming, as she did so—

“No, no, I will not see it. Your word is sufficient ;

it has given me life ; quite sufficient. Poor, poor Amy, what she has suffered !”

“ Not more than yourself, dearest girl.”

“ Ay, but I merited my sufferings by my folly—my foolish jealousy. Oh, William, you must despise me for my weakness ; but I was so convinced. You will never be able to love your weak, foolish Mary as before.”

“ Not love you !” exclaimed the young man, pressing her passionately to his breast. “ My heart must be cold, indeed, ere it ceases to worship—to adore you. You are its life-spring, the fount of its existence, the idol of its shrine. Trample on it—it will beat for you while life remains. I know,” he added, “ that I am unworthy of you—that you might have chosen one far more calculated to win a woman’s love than the rough, uncultivated merchant ; but never, Mary, have found one more devoted, more constant than myself.”

“ And can you—do you really forgive me ?”

“ My own sweet girl.”

At this moment the door of the drawing-room was opened, and Miss Heartland, accompanied by Doctor Currey, entered the apartment.

The face of the lady was red with passion, which the sight of her niece reclining her head on William’s shoulder did not tend to modify.

Her notions of propriety were shocked ; she judged the acts of others by her own precise rule of conduct, as do most hearts that have never loved.

“ Doctor,” she exclaimed, “ this is unpardonable.”

"Upon my word, madam," replied the delighted physician, "I think it very natural. I invariably do the best I can for my patients; and what better could I do than remove from your niece's mind a sorrow which was preying upon it—a misconception which was destroying it?"

"Oh, aunt," said the blushing but now happy Mary, "I have been so deceived."

"No doubt," answered the old maid, drily. "Most girls are, when they listen to the weakness of their hearts. But I cannot allow your health to be trifled with by prolonging this unfortunate interview. Mr. Bowles, I am sure, will see the propriety of his withdrawing."

"Go," whispered Mary; "but don't fear for me now. Plead for me to Amy—to your kind mother; tell them how I have suffered for my folly—how bitterly I repent it. And do you forgive me?"

"I have, Mary, a thousand and a thousand times. But I shall hear from you—see you?"

Despite the presence of her aunt, her niece assured him that he should; and even added to the old maid's intense disgust by permitting her lover to imprint a kiss upon her pale cheek, which was still wet with the absolving tears of regret and sorrow.

"Shocking, shocking!" murmured Miss Heartland.

"A better medicine than any I can prescribe," thought Doctor Currey, as he took his leave, accompanied by his young friend, whose apologies the aunt re-

ceived as ungraciously as was consistent with the common usages of society; for, with all her prejudices, she seldom overstepped them. Perhaps it was the force of education—Miss Heartland had been born and bred a gentlewoman.

"And so," she began, "my poor girl, you have been weak enough to listen to this dissipated young man again, and to believe him?"

"Yes; for he has spoken the truth, aunt."

"And Amy Lawrence," added the spinster, with a sneer; "has she spoken the truth?"

"Happily," said Mary, "she does not know how cruelly I have misjudged her. Poor Amy! But she is so good, she will forgive me, too."

"Mary, I have no patience with you!"

The young lady replied only by a faint smile: probably she recollected that the speaker never had been burthened with that quality.

"They make you believe anything."

"Anything but that William is false, or Amy unworthy."

"Very well; follow your own course; I wash my hands of it. But don't blame me when you find that your friend—as you call the low-bred chit—is your rival, and that you have been made a mere cloak to hide her artful intrigues."

"I shan't, aunt."

Probably the lady was provoked by the coolness of the reply, for she added—

"The creature has already been disappointed in her first speculation upon Mr. Henry Beacham, who, like a sensible young man, has escaped from her trammels. She is now trying her arts on William Bowles—I sincerely trust she may succeed."

"Aunt," exclaimed Mary, fixing her eyes on the old lady's countenance, "were you aware of Mr. Beacham's marriage when you went to Burnley?"

"No—that is," added the lady, who prided herself upon her truth, "I think I saw it in the paper."

"And never told me, though you knew it would have explained all. Is this your love for me? You have wrung my heart by your silence—caused me to act unjustly towards William and a good, innocent, affectionate girl, who loves me. God forgive you, aunt! you may have thought it for the best—I hope you did; but it has caused much misery. For the future, I shall judge for myself."

With these words the speaker, whom the agitation she had endured had considerably weakened, slowly left the drawing-room for the retirement of her own chamber, where tears relieved her; but they were unlike the tears she had so lately shed there: now they were of joy.

"What the deuce are you pressing my hand so earnestly for, William?" demanded Doctor Currey, as they rode home together in the carriage of the latter; "do you think you are still grasping the delicate fingers of Mary Heartland?"

"No," exclaimed the young man, warmly, "it is to express the gratitude I feel for your kindness that I shake you by the hand. You are not offended, I trust?"

"Offended," said the physician, with a smile; "no, my good boy—no : true feeling never offends ; but as the prescription is likely to act well upon my little patient, you must leave her to its effects ; it will work wonders left to itself."

"May it not be repeated?" asked the young man, with a smile.

"We shall see—we shall see. Good bye—let me set you down ; I have wasted half my morning ; they will be waiting for me at the hospital."

Bowles left the carriage, and the benevolent old man proceeded on his errand of mercy, but not before he had promised his young friend to ride over to Burnley, and dine with the family on the following Sunday.

It was some days before poor Amy was sufficiently recovered from the shock she had received to make her appearance in the drawing-room ; and when she did, she appeared so pale and thin, so heart-broken and careworn, that her kind friends were much grieved to see how deeply the arrow had entered her soul.

Mrs. Bowles, in answer to her repeated inquiries after Mary, informed her that she had returned to Manchester in consequence of the illness of her aunt ; one of those amiable little falsehoods which the angel's tear blots as it records. It would have wrung the

sufferer's heart with an additional pang had she been aware of how much misery she had been the innocent cause.

Doctor Currey, who dined there that day, felt deeply interested in her welfare. For a man devoted to science, he had an uncommon stock of weakness at the heart.

He was one of those enlightened men who looked upon his profession as a species of sacerdoce, and he exercised it towards poor and rich accordingly.

Mary, much against her inclination, had been dragged by her aunt to Harrogate.

As her other guardian, Mr. Majorbanks, was absent, she dared not refuse to accompany her, for the vindictive old maid had threatened to appeal, if necessary, in support of her authority to the Chancellor.

"Whatever," she observed, "might be the ultimate result of her niece's affection for William Bowles, never should she return, with her consent, as a visitor to Burnley, while that Amy Lawrence was an inmate of the house."

This decision gave the worthy Doctor subject for reflection, and he acted with his usual foresight accordingly.

The kindest little notes passed daily between the two girls, and our readers may be sure that in Mary's correspondence her lover was not forgotten—in fact, he went every Saturday to Harrogate to see her, and returned on the Monday to business, much to the

annoyance of Miss Heartland, who never failed sarcastically to inquire of him after the pretty Amy Lawrence, but the returning rose of health upon Mary's cheek amply consoled his affectionate heart for all its sufferings and annoyances.

"Amy," said Doctor Currey, as he was sitting one day alone with her in the drawing-room, "I have come over to Burnley expressly to see you."

"You are very kind, sir," she replied; "I shall never be able to thank you sufficiently for all your goodness to a poor orphan."

"Psha!" said the old gentleman; "you know I have no children of my own to love—the unfortunate are my children; and like most parents, those who suffer most are dearest to me. Amy," he added kindly, "you must quit Burnley, and mingle in the world."

"The world," replied the unhappy girl; "and what should I do, sir, in the world, with a blighted heart and a broken spirit. I should wander in it like a shadow, untouched by its pleasures, unfit to partake of them. I would rather remain here with those who have been so kind to me; unless," she added, with sensitive delicacy, "they should tire of me."

"Tire of you, Amy! little fear of that: my old friend Bowles loves you like a daughter, and his wife more than shares the feeling; but the world, Amy, if it cannot heal a broken heart can sometimes bind it. I, too," added the physician, "have had my sorrows and disappointments—it is only in the active occupation

of life that I forget them ; for, as you are well aware, my private fortune renders the pursuit of my profession quite a secondary consideration. Now listen, like a good, sensible girl, to what I have to propose : my home would be too dull for you, for I see few visitors except the sick and the poor."

"You are their Providence, sir."

"Well, well, let me be yours," he continued. "My cousin, Lady Playwell, has written to me to procure a young person as a companion to her only daughter, who is nearly your own age. I have never seen her, but I believe the poor thing has been sadly neglected ; for her mother is a gay woman of the world—a leader of fashion : her whole affection is centred in her son—an extravagant fellow in the Guards. Your position, to say the least, will be unexceptionable, and the effect, if you consent to make the trial, most beneficial. What say you ?"

"No—no ; I cannot leave the last beings who love me," sobbed Amy. "Do not urge it: I am grateful—most grateful for your kindness, sir ; but pray let me die here."

"Amy," said the old man, after a pause, "there is yet another reason, which most gladly I would have kept from you."

"Another reason, sir ?"

"Yes : the world speaks of your being here—supposes, with its usual meddling malice, some motive for the extraordinary attachment of the Bowleses towards

you—glances at you and William ;—should the report reach the ears of Mary?”

“She would smile at it.”

“She would, but her aunt would not—has not, in fact: one motive for removing her niece to Harrogate was the idea she entertains of an affection between you and the lover of her ward. You and I know better—but we are not the world, Amy; and I am convinced that you are too good, too generous, to hesitate at any sacrifice—which, after all, may prove beneficial to you—to insure the happiness of your friends.”

“Let me go,” exclaimed the poor girl, bursting into tears; “let me go. Oh, cruel—cruel! to deem me for an instant capable of ingratitude—capable of forgetting the debt due to friendship, or the faith which, however he I trusted may have broken, will ever bind my heart.”

Amy was a high-principled girl; and a sense of duty supported her in the resolution she had taken.

Despite the remonstrances of her host and his wife, the entreaties of William—who only laughed at the report which Mrs. Small had been the first to propagate—she persisted in her resolution, in which, much to the astonishment of all, Doctor Currey warmly supported her.

A week afterwards she left Burnley, with a heavy heart, and, in company with the benevolent physician, started with him in his carriage for London.

For several days all was regret at Mr. Bowles's.

The father appeared fidgetty and unsettled—he missed Amy's quiet voice and pale face when he returned of an evening from his cotton-mill. His wife was even more at a loss, for her late visitor had so wound herself round her heart, that she sometimes wished, in its recesses, that William's affections had really been engaged to Amy; but, of course, she kept that feeling to herself.

“Oh, this love!” said the old man, as the carriage drove off; “in addition to the already heavy catalogue of its sins and follies, it has broken up our pleasant evenings for a long time to come at Burnley.

CHAPTER VIII.

Evil actions, like young chickens,
They always come home to roost.

EASTERN PROVERB.

MR. CRAB was seated in his study, at his usual occupation of poring over his books, and summing up his ill-gotten gains, when three visitors were announced, one of whom—Mr. Mordaunt—was personally known to him.

Despite his effrontery, his countenance turned to a yet paler hue—for he had not yet recovered from the fright the Frenchman had given him—as he recognised his visitor ; but, with his usual tact, he endeavoured to hide it by an affectation of politeness, offering them chairs, &c.

“Come to look over the establishment, gentlemen?” he observed, taking the cause of their visit for granted ; “happy to see you—ready to attend you in an instant.”

The first visitor, as we have already stated, was Mr. Mordaunt, the second was the eccentric Dr. Rand, the third a well-known barrister of the name of Gibson.

The three had been deputed by a commission to

inquire into the sanity of poor old Gridley; for the Chancellor, upon hearing the statements of the two former, felt that he could not refuse to issue a commission.

"Our visit," said the previous visitor, "is not exactly one of curiosity, Mr. Crab, but of business."

"Business, gentlemen?" faltered the conscience-stricken wretch.

"Yes; we come with a commission from my Lord Chancellor to make inquiries, not only touching the sanity of a patient, but the treatment to which he has been subjected."

"A strange proceeding, gentlemen—a very strange one. I should have thought that my name and character would at least have entitled me to a notice of any such application. I have been quoted in the Commons," he added; "and"—

"It has nothing to do with the Commons," observed the barrister, "but with the commission."

The man of law laid the parchment upon the table before him.

"And what is the name of the patient whom you wish to see?" demanded Mr. Crab.

"You must have read it in the commission," shrewdly observed the barrister.

"True, true," said the madhouse-keeper, trying to recover his assurance—he had only pretended to read the document while he was reflecting on the line of conduct he should pursue—"Simon Gridley."

"Simon Gridley," repeated Mr. Mordaunt.

"I am sorry—very sorry, gentlemen," observed Mr. Crab, "that it is out of my power to comply."

"Why not?"

"Simon Gridley has been buried these ten days."

"Then he has been murdered!" exclaimed the horror-struck Mr. Mordaunt; "and I am too late."

"Murdered!" repeated Crab, in a tone in which he intended to express virtuous indignation. "Be careful what you say, sir: such words are actionable. No one was ever murdered in my establishment."

"Or drugged?" coolly demanded the lawyer.

Crab turned very pale, for he remembered the handkerchief.

"Pray who attended him in his last illness?"

"The physician of the establishment—Doctor Chinon."

"Chinon?" repeated Rand, who during the semi-judicial examination had been occupied in examining the cranium of an idiot who had died in the house. "I should like to see him—clever man—very clever man."

"Unfortunately he has left me."

"Left you?" repeated the barrister, suspiciously.

"Yes; left me, after plundering me of a thousand pounds, which I sent him to the bank to draw for me. My servants can prove that I sent and inquired for him in every direction; but he had left Manchester. For the credit of the establishment, I have hitherto kept the affair a secret."

Even Doctor Rand was surprised that the speaker should have quietly passed over the loss of so large a sum as a thousand pounds. Crab saw the ill-effect his confusion had produced, and bitterly cursed himself for his imprudence: but it was too late—the disclosure was made.

“If, gentlemen,” he nervously added, “you have any doubts as to the treatment of my late patient, you had better consult the medical authorities who examined the body, and gave their opinions on the inquest.”

“There was an inquest?”

“Certainly. His death was sudden, and I deemed it advisable.”

“Upon what grounds?”

“As I told you—its suddenness.”

The three gentlemen shortly after took their leave.

Gridley being dead, it was a delicate matter how further to proceed. The fact of the inquest was a stumbling-block, as, without sure grounds, they felt convinced that neither magistrate nor coroner would grant a warrant for the disinterment of the body.

“Well, gentlemen, what is your opinion?” demanded Mordaunt, as soon as they were seated in a private room at the Royal Hotel; “has there been foul play or not?”

“Chinon is a very clever man,” drily answered Doctor Rand.

“If there has been malpractice in the case,” observed the barrister, “the Frenchman has been the

agent, and Crab either may or may not have been the accomplice. One thing is certain, that, knowing so much, the affair cannot be permitted to rest here. Leave me to my reflections for a day or two: I am not easily baffled if once put upon the scent. By-the-bye, Mordaunt," he added, "I shall require you to introduce me to the banker, and also to the medical gentlemen who examined the body of your friend."

"Dispose of my time as you think proper."

Leaving their learned friend to amuse himself with a manuscript which he had brought with him—a dissertation on Hebrew roots—by way of light reading, the merchant and the man of law sallied forth. Their first visit was to the bank: Mr. Mordaunt's well-known respectability insured every attention, both from the manager and his clerks.

"Do you remember a Doctor Chinon presenting a cheque of Mr. Crab's for a thousand pounds?" demanded the lawyer.

"Perfectly," was the reply.

"Oblige me with the date."

The books were referred to and the date given.

Both Mordaunt and Gibson observed that it was the very day after the inquest.

"Did the gentleman ever present a cheque from the same person before?" continued the latter.

"Never—at least, not to my recollection; in fact, I was so surprised, that I should have hesitated about paying it, but for a private advice, which we invariably

receive before honouring Mr. Crab's draft over a certain amount."

The two gentlemen simultaneously exchanged glances.

Here, at least, was proof that the payment to the Frenchman was a premeditated act, and that he had not called for the money at the bank merely to perform a commission for his employer.

After thanking the manager for his politeness, they withdrew.

"What think you now?" demanded Mordaunt.

"I confess it begins to look very black," said the lawyer, closing the memorandum-book in which he had noted the answers to his queries; "but our next visit will decide more. You have the names of the medical men?"

His companion nodded in the affirmative.

"If my old friend Currey was upon the inquest, and gave it as his opinion that the death was natural, I shall begin to doubt. His character is above all suspicion, and his attainments such that few would weigh the testimony of our learned friend, Doctor Rand, against his evidence."

Fortunately, Doctor Currey was not upon the inquest.

Whilst Mr. Gibson went in his companion's carriage to visit the medical gentlemen, Mordaunt resolved to call upon the Widow Bentley, where the poor old clerk for so many years had lodged—not that he expected she would be able to throw any considerable light upon the transaction; but he was resolved not to neglect

any clue, however remote, by which the ends of justice might be accomplished.

He found the Widow chatting with our reader's old acquaintance Tim's Dick, when he entered the cottage.

Both rose respectfully when they recognised him; for he was known not only as an active, upright magistrate, but for one of the most benevolent men in Manchester.

Both Tim and Mrs. Bentley had put on humble mourning for their poor old friend.

"I am sure," replied the Widow, in answer to one or two leading questions from her visitor, "that there has been foul play: from the morning when Squire Grindem came in his carriage and took him to the madhouse, neither I nor any of his friends were permitted to see him—were we, Tim?"

A meaning shake of the little weaver's head confirmed her testimony.

"Perhaps it was because of his raging state of madness?"

"Madness!" repeated the woman. "Begging your honour's pardon for the remark, he was no more mad than you are. Tim and I have seen him in his *didicum tremens*—I think the doctors call it—a dozen times, but he always came round again—didn't he, Tim?"

"Always."

"They made him out to be mad," continued the speaker, whose tongue was fairly unchained, "because they wished it—because it answered their purpose."

"Whose purpose?" demanded Mr. Mordaunt; for he had all along been puzzled to assign a cause for the treatment which the clerk had been subjected to.

The Widow and the little weaver exchanged glances, but were silent.

"What is it you fear?" continued the gentleman: "I am both able and willing to protect you."

"Speak out," whispered Mrs. Bentley; "if you don't, I will."

Thus urged, Tim recounted the affair of the papers—how Marjoram had obtained them from his wife—his own attempt to repossess himself of them—Flin and Ben's treachery—and how he had nearly been starved to death in the concealed den in the cellar of the former; and concluded by saying that there was something, he was sure, in the whole affair which would not bear the eye of justice looking into.

Mordaunt was of the same opinion.

"And you never had the least communication with your deceased friend," he observed, "respecting the nature of those papers?"

"Never."

"Or looked into them?"

"I had given my word not to do so," replied the poor fellow, proudly; "and, poor as I am, I would not have broken it for all the gold Marjoram could have offered."

"Pardon me," said the worthy magistrate; "I did not put the question because I doubted your integrity; your conduct has sufficiently proved that."

Turning to the Widow, he next inquired if she had heard nothing from her late lodger since he left her?

"Not directly," she replied.

"Indirectly, then?"

Mrs. Bentley hesitated: she feared to compromise poor Lizzy, who had imparted to her, in confidence, the interview between herself and Gridley just before he died.

"It's your turn now to speak out," observed Tim.

The woman did so, and related all that the child had told her: how the old clerk declared that he had been murdered, and the directions he had given her if ever she saw either Amy Lawrence or Tim's Dick.

"And who is Amy Lawrence?" inquired Mordaunt, who began to feel bewildered at the scene of crime which was gradually being developed before him.

"The daughter of an old clerk of Mr. Grindem's."

"This Lizzy is an intelligent child, you say?"

"Like an old woman for that."

"And truthful?"

Both Tim and the Widow assured their visitor that they would answer for her veracity with their lives; and related, in confirmation of their good opinion, the odd writing on the piece of paper which she had brought from the madhouse.

"There was something in that," said the weaver; "I'm sure of it."

Mr. Mordaunt was equally sure, for it had been the

means of calling the attention of the Lodge to the old clerk's case.

Before he left, it was agreed that Lizzy should be invited to drink tea at the Widow's with her young school-friends, on the following evening, and that Mr. Mordaunt should call in, as if by accident, and question her. Before leaving, he offered both Mrs. Bentley and Tim substantial marks of his kindness. They were gratefully but firmly refused, and he left the house with a high opinion both of their honesty and truth.

"I could not take it," said the woman; "it would have been like selling the truth."

"Nor I," said the weaver, rising to depart, "although I must hasten home and toil all night to earn a breakfast for Meg and the children in the morning. If this dark affair is brought to light, it shall never be said that Tim's Dick made a penny by the part he took in it."

CHAPTER IX.

A cunning man, who knew the page
Where Time had writ his secret lore;
Wisdom of Scald, or Egypt's sage,
His aged eyes had ponder'd o'er.

"WELL," said Doctor Rand, as soon as he and the barrister were seated with their friend Mordaunt in the study of the last-named gentleman, "what success? Have you seen the medical men who examined the body of the poor old clerk?"

"I have," replied the barrister.

"And what is their report?"

"They all agreed that Gridley died from a fit of apoplexy, brought on by immoderate drinking."

"I thought as much," observed the learned querist.

"And what do you think?" demanded the merchant.

"That he was murdered—foully murdered!" replied the old man, earnestly. "Those who would have drugged him—no matter from what motive—merely to produce the appearance of madness, would scarcely hesitate at a second crime to conceal the first. Perhaps," he added, with a smile, "we shall detect them yet. I am not easily baffled when once upon the scent; give

me but a hair—a clue so fine, a spider's web would seem a weaver's beam compared with it—and I'll unravel it."

"Unravel these, then," exclaimed Mr. Gibson, at the same time throwing the papers which contained the notes taken by the surgeons on the examination upon the table; "for I confess, with all my learning, I can make but little of them. Talk of the nomenclature of our craft—the doctors beat the lawyers hollow: the Sphynx was an easy riddle to compare with it, and the hieroglyphics light reading."

Doctor Rand took up the papers, and arranging his glasses, began to read them over, half aloud.

The words "congestion," "veins full of blood," "softening of the brain," were the only terms in the report which the listeners understood.

When he came to the last paper, which contained the notes of a young surgeon who had been called in, in consequence of the absence of the one first summoned, the report, although substantially the same, contained an additional remark.

No sooner did the man of science peruse it than his eyes brightened, and he struck his knuckles upon the table with an air of satisfaction.

"Eureka!" he exclaimed.

"What have you found?" demanded his two friends.

"A halter, or the means to provide one, for the assassins."

"Is it possible?"

"Read," he added, "these last notes—the others are twaddle like the rest. But the last note, like the postscript in a woman's letter—not that I know much of the sex—contains the pith."

Mordaunt caught up the paper, and eagerly read the following remark, written in pencil, at the bottom of the paper, which agreed substantially with the rest—

"Monsieur Chinon seems a very clever man—how vastly superior are his attainments to those of the faculty in Manchester. What original and striking views on the structure and anatomy of the brain! Mem.—To ask him the cause of the five or six green spots which I observed just under the cuticle, and which I took at first for extravasated blood, caused by some organic disease."

"I see nothing in that," observed the man of law."

"Most likely not," observed the Doctor, with an air of satisfaction; "how should you? But to me it is as apparent as a flaw in an Act of Parliament, or the omission of a clause in a deed of settlement, would be to you. Let the body be exhumed, and, if but one of those spots remain, I engage to prove, not only to you but to the satisfaction of a jury, that the man has been murdered; more, I will name the means by which the foul act has been accomplished."

"From the spot, Doctor?"

"From the stain—should there be left one—where a spot has been removed."

There was a pause—the confident tone of the speaker carried conviction to his hearers. The merchant, from many years acquaintance with Doctor Rand knew that he was not less prudent than learned, and felt convinced that he had hit upon some clue by which he could prove to his own satisfaction, at least, the means of the old clerk's death, though how far he might succeed in convincing a jury by his demonstration was another matter.

The next question to be decided was how they were to proceed.

Before they could attempt to exhume the body, it was necessary that either a magisterial order or one from the coroner should be obtained—to procure which something more was necessary than the note of the young surgeon and the suspicions of Doctor Rand.

Several schemes were proposed, discussed, and rejected as impracticable.

“I have it!” exclaimed Mordaunt. “I am not only personally acquainted with the Lord-Lieutenant of the county, but known to him as a brother-mason. He will, I am sure, consent to ride over and preside at a meeting of magistrates, and, backed by his support, despite the evidence of the medical men, we shall succeed.”

“Masonry again,” observed the Doctor. “It seems, like the magnetic fluid, to pervade the universe. I have often wondered whether it was derived from Sabism, or had any connection with the worship of the

mysteries of Cabirii. In the 'Insula Hyperborean' of Hecatæous there is a singular remark."

"Never mind the 'Insula Hyperborean' of the learned author whose name I forget."

"Hecatæous," interrupted Rand, gravely, shocked at his old friend's real or pretended ignorance, "a learned"—

"Very learned, no doubt; but our present affair does not regard the ancients, so leave your mouldy classics, my dear doctor, and let us attend to the real business of life. In the morning we will ride over and pay a visit to his lordship, who, on hearing our statement and your demonstrations—which, *par parenthese*, I should feel obliged if you would make as plain and intelligible as possible, for, like myself, the peer is a plain unlettered man—will, I doubt not, convene a bench of magistrates, before whom we can bring this mysterious, foul transaction into light."

"And how are we to pass our evening?" demanded Mr. Gibson.

"Never mind me," observed Dr. Rand; "I have brought my last work on monoliths with me, and shall amuse myself by revising the notes."

"Indeed you will do nothing of the kind," observed his old friend, with a smile; "I have an engagement for you."

"Psha! you know I hate parties."

"This is not exactly a party," replied the merchant, "but a visit to a humble widow, at whose house the

object of our interest lodged for many years. You will meet there, in addition to a shrewd weaver, named Tim's Dick, an intelligent little girl, who witnessed the last moments of poor Gridley, and whose evidence, I have every reason to believe, will prove most important on the trial."

It was finally agreed that the three friends should pay their visit that very evening to the house of Mrs. Bentley : and the escape from the horrors of a party, which the learned Doctor dreaded, almost reconciled him to the postponement of revising his precious manuscript on monoliths.

Despite the secrecy of their proceedings, a rumour of their arrival in the town, armed with a commission from the Chancellor, and their interview with Crab, reached the ears of Small, who thought that it would prove an excellent opportunity to strike the last great blow he meditated at his partner ; this was nothing less than to bring about a marriage between him and his eldest daughter, who had so long lingered in virgin loneliness, that she began to despair of ever changing the state of single blessedness for the more honoured one of married life.

Gilbert Grindem, the once iron-nerved, resolute man, had become, since the death of Gridley, nervous and irresolute as a child.

After a few faint struggles to maintain a show of independence, he gradually yielded to the ascendancy which Small exercised over him, and dreaded each

fresh interview as much as formerly his partner had trembled to encounter him.

Nor was he less weakened in his *physique* than *morale*; the lines of his countenance had gradually become harder, his eyes were anxious and careworn; he was continually looking towards the door of his private room as if he expected some one, and started at the least sound,

"What have I become?" murmured the wretched man; "the slave of my own drudge—a broken cur whom every foot may kick. True," he added, bitterly, "I am rich—have wealth enough to sate the thirst of avarice. Men envy and hate me for my gold—the poor pass me silently and curse me; but I could bear all this, had fortune not mocked me with her gifts by adding doubt and terror to them. I see old Gridley in my dreams, and Richard Lawrence is continually before me. Sometimes I fancy all will be discovered, and then trial, exposure, and ignominious death!"

As the last words faltered upon his lips a violent shudder shook the speaker's frame; his lips became pale, and were spasmodically drawn aside, so as to show the clenched teeth between them.

"But not upon the scaffold," he added, in a low tone; "that last disgrace and triumph of my enemies shall yet be spared me."

There was a gentle knock at the door.

"Come in," said Grindem, nervously.

Small made his appearance, not with that quiet,

stealthy, cat-like step which formerly characterised his entrance, but boldly and firmly, like a man who felt his own importance, and the perfect equality upon which he stood with his partner.

Without waiting to be invited, the little man threw himself into a chair, and unceremoniously kicked aside the little terrier—Grindem's favourite dog: formerly he used to caress him and bring him biscuits. The animal uttered a low growl, and looked up into his master's face as much as to ask if he would not resent it.

"Don't hurt the dog," said its owner mildly.

"Never mind the dog: he's a snarling, snappish little cur; I wonder you should bring him to the office. Will you look over these papers and calculations? The house of Burg and Brothers require ten thousand pounds more upon their last consignment. I think the speculation a good one, but thought it as well to consult you before I decided on closing with them."

Gilbert smiled bitterly; he knew that had not his signature been necessary to draw the funds, his partner would have cared very little for his opinion.

Taking the papers in his hand, he began to look over the figures, Small all the while lolling at his ease, and pretending to read the newspaper.

Dissatisfied at the time Grindem took to consider, he broke in upon his calculations by suddenly demanding if he had heard the news.

"What news?" said the merchant, nervously.

"Only that Mr. Mordaunt has arrived in Manchester,

accompanied by a barrister and a very learned chemist, to inquire into the treatment and sanity of your late clerk, Simon Gridley. 'Tis said they have a commission from the Chancellor."

Grindem turned pale, but was silent.

"Come—have you done?"

"I have."

"And you will make the advance demanded?" said Small, eagerly.

"Yes."

A smile of satisfaction crossed the features of the little partner, as he carelessly pushed the cheque-book, which was lying on the table, over to Grindem—it was a hint to sign.

Grindem mechanically took up the pen and filled the cheque for the amount, then passed it to his partner, who immediately placed it in his pocket-book.

"A lucky affair—was it not?" he observed.

"What affair?"

"The death of Gridley; otherwise it might have been difficult for you and Crab to get out of it cleverly, for there are strange rumours of foul play. I heard it whispered twice upon Change this morning."

"Foul play," repeated his partner; "why the fellow's death was natural—and there is the inquest, if necessary, to prove it."

Ah," observed Small, fixing his eye with a peculiar expression upon him, "that inquest was very cleverly arranged; but Doctor Chinon was a man of ability—

equal to anything. But even inquests have been set aside, and exhumations taken place—not that I imagine for a moment that, even if such should be the case, you have cause to fear.”

“Not the least,” exclaimed Grindem, trying to look indifferent, whilst every nerve was on the rack.

“Of course not—you are too prudent, and Crab too clever: you have nothing to fear.”

“Nothing,” repeated his partner. “There is nothing I have to fear from any inquiry but the production of those infernal papers, which you promised to give up.”

“And which shall one day be yours.”

“When?”

“As soon, my dear sir, as the event to which we both so impatiently look forward shall take place.”

The insinuating and almost affectionate tone in which the last observation was made puzzled Grindem, who had not the least idea to what event the speaker could possibly allude to.

“I do not understand you.”

“Do you suppose,” continued Small, in the same bland tone, “that a doting mother like Mrs. Small, or an affectionate father like myself, have been blind to your very marked attentions to our eldest daughter?”

“What attentions?” faltered the merchant.

“Such as usually precede marriage. Two evenings since were you not seated by her side whilst she played, at your entreaty, that most difficult piece, ‘The Fall of Paris?’”

Grindem groaned at the recollection ; for he hated music, and mentally wished that, instead of a difficult piece of music, it had been an *impossible* one.

Small assumed an air of virtuous severity, such as he usually put on when he visited any of the unfortunate objects of the various charities of which he was treasurer. Fixing his keen little gray eyes upon his victim, who evidently felt disposed to resist this last attack, he sharply demanded if he had been trifling with the affections of his daughter.

“Certainly not.”

“I should hope not ; for, in that case, it would do much to break every tie between us. I can look over much in a friend,” he added, “still more in a son-in-law ; for I know the weakness of the human heart. But an insult to my daughter—a slight to her pure, virtuous, delicate, susceptible nature—would make us enemies—you understand the word—bitter enemies. As we perfectly understand each other, and you have declared your intentions to her father, the sooner everything is settled the better. When shall we fix the wedding day ?”

“Never !” shouted his partner, with a last effort to shake off the yoke. “Plotter and serpent, I will defeat you in your last attempt to subdue me. What ?” he added, “tie myself to a gorgon—a fright who has been angling for a husband for the last fifteen years ! I’d cast myself into the Red Sea as soon !”

“Or a prison ?” inquired Small, with a sneer.

"Or a prison : even there I should be free from your malice."

"To be sure," observed his partner, "you would have society. Crab, probably, would bear you company."

Grindem was silent.

"As Chinon, clever as he is at his trade of poisoning"—this was a guess—"this time will be outwitted. Suspicion already points at you ; and old Gridley's papers will go far to insure your conviction, if I surrender them."

"You would never be such a villain?"

"Mr. Grindem, I am a moral man. The affair weighs upon my conscience ; added to which, after your conduct to my precious child, I consider no act of mine ought to surprise you."

"It ought not, indeed."

"I shall forward them, therefore, to Mr. Mordaunt this very evening ; he will know how to use them. I can't appear in the affair myself—my feelings won't permit that!"

"Villain!" exclaimed the enraged merchant, springing upon him, and seizing him by the throat, "I will take care you never shall. If I am hanged, it shall be for ridding the world of a sneaking, contemptible rascal—a thing without soul or honour."

In the brief struggle which ensued the little man was like a dwarf in the hands of a giant.

Gradually he got purple in the face, and his eyes seemed starting from his head.

Grindem became alarmed at the effect of his fury, and, releasing his hold, the little man fell, half-strangled, into his chair.

"You shall repent this," he gasped, as soon as he recovered sufficient breath to speak.

His partner walked towards the door between the inner and outward office, and drew the bolt. Small once more became alarmed.

"What would you do?" he demanded.

"Fear not for your miserable existence," exclaimed the merchant; "the fit of passion has passed, and I am once more myself; let us speak calmly."

"I am quite calm," replied his partner.

"Small, when I first took you into my office," began Grindem, "I little expected to see a day like this. You were a poor, ragged, wretched orphan, without friends or relatives to care or provide for you. No menial office was too humble for you. You were grateful then. Step by step I raised you till you have become my equal in the firm. You owe me some gratitude."

"Gratitude!" repeated the little man, with a sneer; "for what? For such treatment as you would have resented, if offered to your dog? You say you raised me; it is false—I raised myself. I became useful, and then necessary to you; toiled that you might heap up wealth. Did you ever throw a kind word to me or my sons? Did you not permit us to become the butt of your pampered nephew—the drudges of your caprice? And you talk of gratitude."

"Interest, then—at least I enriched you."

"I enriched myself."

"And nothing but this marriage will content you?"

"Nothing."

"Give me five days to consider of it?" replied the merchant.

"No."

"Three?"

"No."

"Two? Small, it is not much to ask; you may draw the rein too tight. By heavens!" he added, "before I will be driven like a slave, without a moment for reflection, I'll end this dishonourable existence."

The tone of calm resolution in which the menace was spoken alarmed the little man. Death would deprive him of the fruit of his schemes and plottings, even as far as his interest in the firm was, with an exception too trifling to name, entirely his wealthy partner's.

"Two, be it, then," he exclaimed; "and use them wisely. The marriage you have so scornfully refused brings security, honour, and the enjoyment of that wealth for which you have deeply sinned. I may spare my son-in-law; but certainly not the man whose desperate hands even now were raised against my life."

With these words, the speaker rose, carefully adjusted his cravat, and, without casting a look upon his crest-fallen partner, quitted the room.

"Two days," murmured the wretched man, "it is not much; but with resolution and wealth at command

it is everything. Courage, Gilbert—courage,” he added, “this is not a time to ponder like a dreamer, but for action—action; come the worst, there is one way to balk the scoundrel yet.”

Ordering his carriage, the merchant left the office.

His first visit was to his lawyer, with whom he remained closeted for several hours, his next to his bankers. As he requested to see the senior partner of the house, he was shown into his private room at once.

“Well,” said the banker, smilingly—for his visitor was perhaps the wealthiest of his clients, and kept the largest balance in his hands, and never required accommodation, nor overdrew his account—“this is a pleasure—you have been as difficult of access lately as a minister.”

“I have not been well lately,” observed Grindem, despondingly.

“You occupy yourself too much with business. Surely it is time you should retire?”

“It is not that. I have come to confide a deposit to your care.”

“Another investment,” thought the man of figures, with a secret sigh of envy, when he thought on the colossal fortune of the speaker. “Money, bonds, or title-deeds?” he demanded, aloud.

“Neither—my will.”

“Your will!” exclaimed the banker, with a smile. “Psha! time enough for that these dozen years; you are hipped. Try Buxton, or send for Currey, he will

soon set you to rights. On my honour, I never saw you look less like a dying man ; your constitution seems of iron."

"It was," said Gilbert, mournfully, and he might have added, "and my heart, too;" but he did not wish to display the least touch of weakness. "I have lately had certain premonitory symptoms which it would be unwise to neglect."

"A prudent man in everything," observed the banker.

"Have you any objection to act as one of my executors?" demanded Gilbert.

"Not the least."

"I have joined a friend of my nephew, who, you are aware, is absent from England, with you—Mr. William Bowles."

"He is young," observed the gentleman.

"He is honest," replied the merchant. "You will find ample instructions in the event of my death. Should Mr. Henry Beacham be absent from England, the firm must no longer be carried on."

"What!" exclaimed the banker with a look of unfeigned astonishment, "break up the firm—close the accounts of the richest house in Manchester ; why it's a fortune. You surely jest?"

"I never jest."

"Consider the immense loss ; your profits must be at least twenty thousand a year."

"Enough for happiness will be left. On this point, sir, my resolution is irrevocable. With my consent

my nephew shall never become a merchant. You will, therefore, at once appoint a receiver, call in the accounts, wind up the affairs, and fund the proceeds."

"Certainly—certainly. But your partner, Mr. Small?"

"Can continue, if he pleases."

"Without capital! that you well know to be impossible."

"That's his affair," replied Grindem, with a bitter smile. "Good morning, sir; and remember that my partner has not, either while I live or when I am dead, the least right to sign or draw in the name of the firm."

The banker bowed, shook hands with his client, and saw him to his carriage.

"Now then," thought Grindem, as he drove to the Royal Hotel, "to try the power of that key to the human heart—to see if the wealth I have so sinned and struggled for will serve its master at his need. Devil—devil!" he murmured; "from a boy the pale yellow metal was my idol! I remember how I gloated over the first piece I could ever call my own. My mother gave it me upon my birthday—fatal gift! It awoke the demon avarice, which lay like a torpid serpent slumbering at my heart. I swore to become rich—I am so; but, oh! at what price!"

A fearful shudder passed over his frame as the recollection of the means by which he had piled gold on gold shot through his memory; and for the first time

in his life, perhaps, he loathed the thing for which he had so deeply sinned.

No sooner did Grindem arrive at the hotel, than a messenger was despatched for the clever Mr. Marjoram, whose shrewdness had struck the merchant on a former occasion.

"I thought so," said the experienced thief-taker, rubbing his hands in pleasing anticipation of gain: "I thought so: I knew that my dealings with the firm of Grindem and Small were not closed. There's a balance in my favour yet."

Throwing off his office coat, and assuming his most business-like air, the speaker followed the messenger to the hotel.

"Marjoram," said the merchant, in a low tone, as soon as they were alone, "I have sent for you once more about those infernal papers. I have obtained a clue to them—but first," he added, fixing his eyes anxiously upon his countenance, "can I trust you?"

"Implicitly," replied the officer, laying his hand upon his broad chest, as if to feel for his heart; "gentlemen who pay liberally can always command confidence."

"The payment shall be princely."

Marjoram bowed yet lower.

"The papers have fallen into the hands of my partner Small," continued the merchant, "and though valueless in themselves, they are of the utmost importance to me."

"Into Mr. Small's hands," repeated Marjoram, with an involuntary expression of admiration on his countenance at the cleverness of the junior partner. "Hang me, if I did not think so."

"Why?"

The man related all that had passed on the occasion of Tim's Dick's affair, and Small's presence on the spot.

It was evident both to him and the merchant that Flin had been the accomplice of the little man.

"They must be mine," exclaimed Grindem, "no matter at what price."

"It will be very difficult," said Marjoram, with a sigh.

"Name your price," said Grindem, calmly.

"I really don't know what to say."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes," replied the officer, after a few moments' reflection; "it is possible."

"Then accomplish it. Will a thousand pounds procure them?"

"No."

"Two?"

"No."

"Five?" shouted the merchant.

"Five will do it," said the man.

"Bring them to me in two days and I will make it ten," added Gilbert, in a tone of deep determination; "do you hear? ten thousand pounds—wealth—ease

for your life—fortune for your children—you know me to be a man of my word.”

Marjoram absolutely bounded from his chair at the munificence of the offer: ten thousand pounds—the sum appeared to him almost fabulous—in all his experience he had never heard of such a bait.

“There is a halter at the end of this affair,” he thought; “but that’s not my business. What would a couple of hundred pounds for a conviction be compared with such a sum.”

Speaking aloud, he added—

“I must have money to proceed with.”

Grindem threw across the table five notes of a hundred pounds each.

“If you want more,” he said, “let me know—the means shall not be wanting for success.”

Marjoram pocketed the notes with more satisfaction than ever he had before experienced in his life.

It was finally arranged that they should meet every morning and evening at the hotel, to report and hear progress of the affair, after which understanding the officer took his leave.

“Let me but obtain them,” said Grindem, when he was once more alone, “and I’ll beggar the villain—drive him from the firm without a shilling—make him feel in poverty and the long agony of years the burning pain the baffled schemer feels who finds his well-spun web destroyed. Should I fail,” he added, “there is still one resource—still one.”

A deep gloom spread itself over the speaker's countenance, as he cast himself into a chair.

When Marjoram arrived at his office he found William Bowles waiting to receive him.

The frank-hearted young man knowing his cleverness, and anxious to unmask a plot which he felt convinced, from what had passed at the dinner at Small's, existed against the happiness of his friend, came to consult him about the hundred-pound note.

"Good morning, sir—good morning, sir!" exclaimed the officer, in a tone of disappointment, at finding a visitor—for he required every moment to concert the means of proceeding in the affair he had so much at stake upon; "office business, I presume? If so, as I am very much engaged on an important case, perhaps you will have the kindness to see one of my brother-officers: there's Mr. Snapper, a very clever man—very—equal to any affair."

"But this is a very peculiar one," observed his visitor; "it concerns the reputation of the son of a member of one of the first firms in Manchester."

"Indeed!"

"Of course the communication is private?"

"Strictly."

"And confidential?"

Marjoram bowed.

"I have some reason, then, to believe that Mr. Matthew Small"—

"What!" interrupted Marjoram, with a look of

delight ; " Matthew Small, son of old Small, Grindem's partner ? "

" The same," replied Bowles, astonished at his eagerness.

" My dear sir, be seated," said the man, handing his visitor, whom he had hitherto permitted to stand in the office, a chair ; " pray be seated."

" First, I must inform you—"

" Stay," said Marjoram, " allow me to draw the bolt. There," he added, as soon as he had prevented the possibility of interruption, " now then you can proceed ; but first let me entreat you, if you require my assistance, to give me your entire confidence. You have no idea how many affairs are mismanaged from want of confidence between parties."

William then related the circumstance of Pike's finding the letter in young Small's coat-pocket, the changing of the note at the hotel, and the suspicions which the circumstances had naturally given rise to.

When he had done, his listener demanded if he had the letter.

" I have."

" And the note ? "

" Both are in my possession."

" Case is clear," said the officer. " Breach of trust—transportation for life. You have only to place those proofs in my hands, and I'll arrange the affair at once."

" That," replied William, " is not exactly what I wish."

"What is it you wish?" demanded Marjoram, "Remember our conditions, sir—unreserved confidence."

"You shall have it," continued the young man. "I have reason to believe that the Smalls have by some means, the nature of which I cannot even guess, obtained an undue ascendancy over the mind of the uncle of my absent friend."

"Not unlikely."

"I would unmask them—I have no other motive."

The officer reflected a few minutes before he answered.

"You have been candid with me, sir, and I will be equally candid with you. The Smalls have a hold upon Mr. Grindem, who has employed me confidentially in this matter."

"He knows of the robbery, then?"

"No," continued Marjoram, "not yet. When I said in this matter, I meant the affair between him and his partner. Place those proofs in my hand, and I pledge myself to extricate him."

Bowles hesitated.

"It will save your friend."

"If I thought that"—

"Come, sir, a bargain. Let me have either the letter or the note, I don't care which, and I pledge myself that in four-and-twenty hours old Mr. Grindem shall be as perfectly free from the influence of the Smalls as you are at this moment."

"There is the letter," said his visitor, reluctantly drawing it from his pocket. "Remember I rely upon

you—you have hitherto borne the character of an honest man !”

“ I am an honest man, Mr. Bowles.”

“ I believe you.”

Shortly afterwards William Bowles took his leave.

“ Ten thousand pounds !” exclaimed Marjoram, as he closed the door of the office after him. “ I am a rich man at last.”

CHAPTER X.

The viper that hath stung you was engendered
In thy own nest—nurtured and reared by thee.
Thus heaven doth turn the evil of our nature on ourselves,
And our own crimes become our punishment.

AT a well-known tavern not far from the Queen's Theatre, a party of young men were seated at a table, enjoying themselves. Wine was flowing in abundance ; and the fumes of cigars and punch denoted one of those bacchanalian orgies in which the fast youths of the present day so recklessly expend both health and money.

Matthew Small, the hopeful heir of Grindem's partner, was seated at the head of the table, as the giver of the feast.

The money he had so dishonestly possessed himself of had turned his brain. To him it appeared, even while fast melting away in dissipation, as inexhaustible, and he pursued his course with all the reckless folly of a vulgar mind—with all the excitement of a vicious nature.

“Drink, gentlemen,” he exclaimed, “drink. Everything is paid for. No Yorkshire. I have invited you,

and am your host—delighted to see so many jolly fellows round me. Father gave a party on being made partner; and it's only just I should give one on being made a partner's son. So fill—fill."

"Hear, hear!" shouted the young men, most of whom were in a state of intoxication. "Jolly dog! Good fellow."

"I am of age," continued the hopeful Matthew; "arrived at years of discretion—got my fortune; and hang me if I don't spend it on my friends."

The idea of Matthew Small having inherited anything from his family, or otherwise, appeared a mystery to those who were sufficiently sober to understand his assertion; for they knew his origin, and the state of absolute beggary from which his father had risen; but they were too polite to contradict him.

"Of age!" whispered one.

"What can he have inherited?" added another.

"Perhaps his aunt, the old nurse at the hospital, is dead," observed a third, in an under-tone.

"Who'll bet fifty on the Derby?" demanded Matthew, who was becoming more and more intoxicated.

"I will," exclaimed several voices.

Bets were made, and entered in hieroglyphics which it would have puzzled the writers exceedingly to have deciphered the following morning.

Healths were given, speeches made, and pledges of friendship exchanged, which it would have been as useless to remember as to make: the speakers being as

worthless as the words they uttered were hollow and insincere.

In the street opposite the tavern in which the orgies were taking place, three men were walking up and down, occasionally casting impatient glances towards the house, and conversing in low whisperings; the centre one was wrapped in a large cloak, whose fur collar partially concealed his features—it was Mr. Marjoram, the police-officer; the others, who were in uniform, were two of his satellites.

“You perfectly understand my directions?” observed the former, for the third time.

“Perfectly, sir; we are to engage the young fellows in a row, and, on the least resistance, secure the person of young Small.”

“Exactly so.”

“But if they should not give us occasion?” demanded one of the men.

Marjoram fixed his eyes upon him with an air of surprise, and demanded how long he had been engaged in the force.

“Six months,” was the reply.

“Six months,” repeated his superior, with a smile of contempt; “and ask how to act if he should not give you the occasion. Make one—it is as easy as avoiding it; a word will provoke them when their blood is hot with wine. Young Small is a conceited, self-important fool, with more money than wit. I had not been half the time in the police you have been,

before I would have made an occasion of a straw, laid crossways in the street, or a word spoken, though but in a whisper. Do you think it was by *waiting* for occasions, that I rose to my present position? No, no, —I made them."

"Certainly, sir," said the man, struck with admiration at the lesson of his superior. "But then every fellow has not your tact."

"Perhaps not. Hark!" he continued. "They are coming. Be firm, and remember my instructions: if you execute this neatly, you shall both be serjeants before the month is out. I shall watch at a distance. When you have secured your man, bring him to the office, where I shall be sitting to receive the night charges."

"Are we to use our staves?" inquired the second policeman, anxiously.

"Not on Matthew Small," replied Marjoram; "on the others as you please. I have placed several men within reach; you will not be without assistance. Remember, five sovereigns each in the morning, and certain promotion."

With these words the speaker rapidly walked on, as he did not wish to be seen in the transaction.

When he reached the corner of the street he paused, to see how his instructions would be carried out.

With loud shouts of mad laughter the party left the door of the tavern.

The voice of Matthew Small was heard above those of his companions, to drown the vague terror which

the remembrance of the act he had committed involuntarily forced upon him.

He had taken more wine than his friends, whose ironical compliments had flattered his pride, till he was in one of those insulting, overbearing humours which brave everything.

"Come boys—jolly dogs!" he hiccupped; "let's to the oyster-rooms, and finish the night."

"The man with the *hysters*!" exclaimed a young clerk, who had heard of the amusing *contretemps* at his father's party, and could not resist the opportunity of a jest.

"Who said that?" demanded Small.

There was a silence—no one chose to acknowledge it.

"Cursed ungentlemanly!" continued the speaker, his eyes flashing in drunken fury; "I have treated you—paid the bill—the best of everything. If I knew the fellow, I'd—I'd—but I suppose he has not the courage to own it."

"What would you do?" demanded the culprit, who could not endure the imputation of cowardice before his friends."

"Pull his nose."

"I said it," said the young clerk, putting himself in an attitude of defence.

Although Matthew was naturally a cur, he could not avoid—without exposing his total want of courage—taking some notice of the assertion.

Instead, however, of acting up to his threat, he merely observed that the young man was no gentleman, and that he would settle the affair like a man of honour in the morning.

"Why not now?" exclaimed several, who began to be tired of their host's important airs, and who desired nothing better than to finish the evening by a spree, as they termed it.

"Move on there, gentlemen!" said the two policemen, who were on the look out, and eagerly seized the occasion.

"I shan't!" said Matthew, violently.

"We can't permit any rows here."

"Do you know who I am?" continued the drunken fool; "my name is Matthew Small, Junior, Esquire, son of old Grindem's partner. I'll have your coats stripped from your backs—write to the Commissioners. Sir Charles Shaw is my friend—insult a man of my rank—impudent scoundrels!"

"We aint no scoundrels; and if you don't go home quietly we shall be obliged to lock you up."

"I'd like to catch you!"

"Come, sir," said one of the men, laying his hand upon his arm; "consider how distressed your mamma will be."

A loud laugh from the young men completely raised Small's fury. Shaking off the hand of the speaker, he struck him a violent blow upon the chest, which for a moment staggered him.

In an instant he was seized by the second policeman.

"Let me go, rascal!"

"So you shall—with us," said the man, coolly.

"Hang it!" exclaimed one of the young men, seeing that the policemen were dragging their companion away; "although the fellow is a cur, we can't leave him in this way: let's rescue him."

The proposition was received with a cheer, and the entire party at once attacked the police, who, in self-defence were compelled to use their staves.

A regular fight ensued. During the struggle Matthew succeeded in relieving himself from the grasp of his captors, and, without waiting to see the result, valiantly took to his heels, leaving his friends to get out of the affair as they could.

He ran till he reached the corner of the street leading to the Infirmary, where he encountered two more of the force, who were hastening to the assistance of their comrades.

The men had received their instructions from Marjoram, and at once secured him.

"I have nothing to do with the row," exclaimed the fugitive.

"We shall see."

"I'll give you a sovereign if you let me go?"

"Can't, sir."

"Two?" added Matthew, surprised at the unusual integrity of the men.

"Not for ten. *You are wanted.*"

These words struck a vague fear to the heart of the prisoner. The little energy he possessed appeared to desert him, and he suffered himself to be led unresistingly to the office, where Marjoram was impatiently awaiting his arrival.

He had not been more than half-an-hour in the lock-up, when the rest of the police arrived, with three of his late companions in custody, when the charge of being disorderly and drunk, together with an attack upon the police, was regularly entered into.

"Serious case," said the officer, as he wrote the depositions of the men; "who struck the first blow?"

"Mr. Small," said one of the police.

"It's false!" roared Matthew; "I never struck at all."

"That," replied Marjoram, in one of his blandest tones, "you will have an occasion of proving before the magistrates in the morning."

"Do you know who I am?" demanded the hopeful youth, whose courage had revived at the assault being the only charge.

"Perfectly."

"If I hit the fellow, I can pay for it, I suppose?"

"You will have to pay for it."

At this moment the landlord of the house where the party had taken place arrived, and offered bail for the appearance of the young men in the morning.

"I will take it for all but Mr. Small."

"And why not for me?" demanded Matthew, turning

suddenly pale; for his conscience again began to be uneasy.

"Ay," said the landlord; "why not for Mr. Small?"

"Because he is intoxicated."

"So are the others."

"Not so much as he is. I should ill fulfil my duty were I to risk the peace of the town being disturbed by releasing him in his present state."

It was in vain that the landlord renewed his offers—Marjoram was inflexible.

At each fresh refusal the countenance of the culprit became yet paler: the cold, quiet eye of the officer which was constantly fixed upon him, disconcerted all his self-possession, and from blustering he descended to the most abject entreaties.

We need not say that they were useless.

The rest of the young men were released in the morning upon the bail of the landlord, who regarded the whole affair as a mere drunken frolic; although he was surprised at the tenacity with which Marjoram persisted in excluding so respectable a person as young Mr. Small from the benefit of his security.

"You will hear of this in the morning," he observed, as he left the office with the liberated prisoners. "Mr. Small, senior, is a man of influence."

"I know it."

"He will be much surprised."

"Not more than I expect," answered Marjoram, with a peculiar smile.

As soon as they were alone Matthew, whom terror had rendered suddenly sober, and as humble as he had previously been arrogant, approached the desk where the officer, who watched every movement of his countenance, sat, and demanded, in a respectful manner, to speak to him.

"Speak out, sir."

"Of course," said the young man, with a forced smile, "you—ha, ha, ha!—the question is very ridiculous—but I may as well ask it: you have *no other charge* against me?"

"What other charge do you expect?" demanded Marjoram, who saw that he should have but little difficulty in bringing his prisoner to the state of mind he wished.

There was a pause. Matthew trembled at his own indiscretion, and feared he had committed himself.

Still he could not repress the burning curiosity which preyed upon him: he felt it would be a relief, in the present state of his feelings, to know the worst.

"Nothing," he faltered; "that is, I had a quarrel lately with Mr. Henry Beacham, and as old Grindem, my father's partner, is very resentful, I thought perhaps he or some one had trumped up some accusation against me; but of course I am mistaken."

"There is no *trumped-up charge* against you."

"Is there any charge?" demanded Matthew, desperately.

Marjoram rang his bell, and a couple of officers appeared.

"Take this gentleman," he said, "to one of the cells—mind it is a comfortable one—and lock him carefully in; visit him every quarter of an hour, and report to me."

"But you have not answered my question?" exclaimed the young man, in a state of still greater excitement.

"Mind," said the officer, "that there is nothing in the cell by which he can injure himself; remove his handkerchief and cravat; and, stay—one of you had better remain with him."

The cool, quiet tone in which these orders were given completely overcame the little stock of firmness which the prisoner possessed; nor was the conduct of the officer without calculation: long experience told him that nothing was so likely to subdue the courage of a fellow like Small as a few hours' reflection in a cell, with a policeman to guard him.

"I shall succeed," said the officer, rubbing his hands in anticipation of the golden recompense he expected from Grindem; "the fellow is a cur, and would as soon rob his own father as his employer. A few hours more and I shall have him as pliant and ready to fall into my plans as though I had had the fashioning of him for years. I wonder how the fellow ever found courage to abstract the letter—still more to change the notes: but rogues are generally fools, and, like the fox, leave a trail behind by which to hunt them down."

The speaker was perfectly right in his estimate of Small's character.

At an early hour in the morning, when he entered his cell, he found him overwhelmed with terror, and ready to be moulded to anything.

"Marjoram," he exclaimed, "for heaven's sake tell me why you refused bail for me last night?"

The officer shook his head.

"Is there any other charge against me?"

"Sad affair, sir."

"But what is it?" continued the conscience-stricken youth.

"Transportation for life, at the very least; and your father such a respectable man, too: it will break his heart!"

Matthew turned as pale as a sheet—he felt that all was discovered.

"Breach of trust, young gentleman, is a most serious affair, and the law is very severe. Upon my honour I could almost pity you, for your position is a desperate one. You have not the slightest chance of escape. Mr. Grindem's letter has been found in your coat pocket; the hundred-pound note you changed at the Royal is in my possession, with your own indorsement at the back; the number of the note is entered in the letter-book of the firm: so I see no chance for you."

"But there is one," exclaimed the young man, eagerly; "I am sure there is: Grindem will not dare to appear against me."

"It does not depend on Mr. Grindem," replied the officer. "The affair is in my hands—the note is in

my hands—the letter is in my hands—you are in my hands—and I am the only person who can step between you and the punishment of your crime.”

“Do so,” said the wretched youth, “and I’ll give you all the money I have left. You shall have half my salary for the next twelve months. You know I shall be rich one day. Trust to my gratitude.”

“Sir,” said Marjoram, with the air of a man who had received a deep offence, “do you think to bribe me?”

“No,” answered Matthew, very humbly.

“Or insult me?”

“I only appealed to your feelings.”

“Well, if it was only that,” said the officer, “I can look over it; for I have feelings; and it is a shocking thing that a respectable young man should be placed in the dock to be tried for felony, all his former companions and friends staring at him, making bets, perhaps, whether he will be found guilty or not.”

“Horrible!”

“Well, sir, there is one condition on which, perhaps, I may be disposed to screen you. Mark me—I don’t say positively. Do you know anything of the papers left by old Gridley, your father’s partner’s late clerk?”

“Nothing, upon my soul!”

“I am sorry for you,” said the officer, drily; “there is no hope for you! Good morning—keep up your spirits. The charge will be brought forward before the magistrates at twelve.”

The speaker knew that Matthew lied when he denied all knowledge of the transaction ; for he remembered that both he and his father were at the tavern near Flin's cellar the night the papers had been obtained.

"Stop—only a minute?"

"No."

"Send for my father?"

"Impossible!"

"For Mr. Grindem, then?"

"He would not come. Again I tell you," said Marjoram, "it is with me, and not Mr. Grindem, that you have to deal. The proofs, as well as the case, are in my hands. I would have found you a loophole to escape, but you have rejected it."

"I do not reject it," exclaimed the terrified delinquent. "Pray forgive me! I'll not deceive you again. I—I know where Gridley's papers are."

"I thought so."

"My father has them."

"I guessed as much. Now, then, listen to the only condition on which I will give up the letter and note, which, if once produced before a jury, will send you a convicted felon from the country for life. I must have those papers."

"How am I to obtain them?"

"Ask your father for them."

"My father would as soon part with the apple of his eye—with his life! he would not give them up to save fifty sons! The canting old rascal would make a virtue

of holding out. They are the secret of his hold over his partner—the key-stone of his fortune—the instrument of his revenge!”

“In that case,” said the officer seriously, “I am sorry for you; for unless those papers are in my possession within eight-and-forty hours, you stand a fair chance of transportation.”

“Anything but that,” said Small. “You ask impossibilities. Would you have me steal them?”

“Certainly not,” said the officer. “Do you think that I would propose that you should descend into your father’s study in the middle of the night like a house-breaker, prise the lock of his secretary, and take them *from the secret drawer under the false bottom*? Nothing of the kind. I am a man of honour, Mr. Small.”

Matthew wondered how the officer came to be so well acquainted with the place where they were kept, and the existence of the secret drawer in the secretary.

The fact is Marjoram recollected having seen Small, senior, purchase the piece of furniture in question at a shop in High Street, and, under pretence of requiring one like it, had drawn the information he required from the tradesman who sold it.

“Stay one moment,” said the prisoner; “you shall have them. I will obtain them.”

“Honestly, of course?” said the officer.

“Of course,” sighed Matthew.

“When?”

“Either to-night or to-morrow night. Let one of

your men be at the front of the house between the hours of two and three in the morning. I'll open the shutters and give them to him."

"I'll be there myself," observed Marjoram, complacently; for he already felt that he was a ten thousand pounds man. "And now hark you, sir; think not because I permit you to leave this office that you are free. Attempt to quit Manchester and you will find yourself arrested on the instant. Eyes you cannot see will be dodging you, arms you deem far off ready to seize you. Although at large in the eyes of the world, you are as much my prisoner in the streets of Manchester as in this cell with half-a-dozen officers to guard you."

"I know it," said Matthew, wringing his hands despairingly: "I feel it."

"The least attempt to escape, therefore, and nothing can save you. I never trust any man a second time who plays me false once."

With this understanding, at a later hour in the morning, the worthy Mr. Marjoram, on pretence that Matthew Small was no longer intoxicated, permitted him to depart from the police-office, and only exacted a nominal promise from him to appear before the magistrate, to answer for being found in a row in the streets, if called upon.

No sooner did Matthew feel himself at liberty than his first impulse was to fly. He had still a considerable sum left, and he thought, if once he could reach

London, it would be easy to remain concealed there till his respectable father could make matters strait with Grindem.

Full of this idea, he hastened to the terminus, occasionally casting anxious and hurried looks behind him to see if he was followed.

But he had to do with a man whom long habit had rendered familiar with every move, and, stopping at a corner of the street to read the time-table, he was accosted by a fellow in plain dress.

"The train starts in half-an-hour," observed the man.

"So I perceive," said Matthew.

"Do you think of going by it?"

"I?—oh dear, no!"

"So much the better!" replied the questioner. "Mr. Small, this is not your way home. Your friend Marjoram would not like to hear of your being so near the terminus. Take my word, and return upon your way; it's dangerous to proceed."

"Dangerous!" repeated the mystified Small.

The stranger loosened one or two of the buttons of his over-coat, and discovered the uniform of the new police beneath it. Matthew turned pale, and silently retraced his steps.

"I must keep a sharp look out, or the bird will be off," muttered the disguised officer.

"I am like a fly in a spider's web," thought Matthew: "he has me in the toils, and, despite myself, I

must yield! Curse the money! would I had never seen it!"

Small made no second attempt during the day; he was completely cowed; the bully was subdued.

On his arrival at home he saw a person similarly dressed watching for him; the man gave him a knowing wink as he passed, and whispered—

"All right; go in."

When he left for the office he was dogged again, and so during the different courses he made in the town; at every turn he felt that he was watched, and that it was hopeless to struggle against the bonds which, although invisible, were not the less securely wound around him.

CHAPTER XI.

Of all beings in the world the most truly unhappy is your miserable old bachelor: he is speculated upon for his wealth, persecuted for a legacy, and pays the penalty of a life of selfishness in a death of solitude.—MACKENZIE.

THE family of Lady Playwell, into which Dr. Currey had introduced poor Amy Lawrence, consisted of a son and daughter. Her husband, Sir Charles—a placid gentleman, who detested trouble of all kinds, and who, provided he could spend a quiet evening at his club and enjoy his usual rubber, willingly left the direction of the family to his busy, manœuvring better-half, whose active mind was never more happily occupied than when engaged in some scheme or other for the welfare of her darling son, whose extravagance she assisted, whose errors she palliated. With a doting mother's weakness, she encouraged him in all the fashionable vices which the lax morality of the present day has softened down into the name of pleasures.

Adolphus—the name of the hopeful scion of the Playwells—was in the Guards; and even there he was considered a fast young man.

He kept five or six horses, a French valet, an innu-

merable number of pet dogs, and heaven knows what beside.

Nothing delighted his foolish parent more than having him cited for some act of extravagant folly; it gratified her pride. In the vanity of her heart, she firmly believed that her idol would make a great match, and so redeem everything.

Miss Jane Playwell, her daughter, was quite a secondary consideration. Unfortunately she was plain, and her character, naturally soured by the neglect she had from infancy experienced, of a repulsive, disagreeable cast.

She had a habit—very uncommon in good society—of speaking her mind on all occasions; and as frequently made her mother and brother the objects of her blunt, bitter satire, as her mere acquaintances.

Perhaps the ill-educated girl—we speak of course of her temper when we say ill-educated; for she was not without accomplishments—took a secret pleasure in mortifying her hopeful brother, by putting his conduct in a ridiculous light, drawing out his follies, and vexing her mamma; to whose observation, that she was a strange creature, she invariably replied—

“I am what you have made me.”

There was a truth in this which Lady Playwell, with all her knowledge of the world, could not comprehend.

Such was the family in which Amy found herself domesticated, as companion to Miss Playwell. Her

kind friend the doctor had calculated wisely, that the change from the natural circle of Mr. Bowles's household to the cold, artificial one of St. James's Square, would call forth her energies and strengthen her mind.

He was not mistaken in his calculations: it did strengthen it.

The baronet and his lady were seated at the breakfast-table; the subject of their conversation was the hourly-expected arrival of a brother of the former from India—a man who had wasted the spring and summer of his existence in amassing wealth, which he was incapable, in the autumn of his life, of enjoying.

As his fortune was known to be colossal, its ultimate disposition had become an object of speculation to the lady, who, in her blind fondness for her son, had already decided in her own mind that her idol Adolphus should be the general's heir.

"I tell you, Sir William," she observed, in a positive tone, in answer to an objection which he had made to a proposed arrangement; "Miss Lawrence must give up her room. What! when your dear, dying, rich brother is returning from India to make us all happy, would you neglect anything that may contribute to his comfort?"

"But the room you propose, my love, is unhealthy—just over the bath," remonstrated the baronet.

"No matter; the girl is not made of wax, I suppose."

"Her health is delicate. Besides, she is here more as a friend to our daughter than a dependent. Clara, I have observed with joy, has already profited by her elegant manners and gentle grace."

"Clara, Sir William, will never profit by anything."

"She is no favourite of yours," observed the father bitterly. "Would not Adolphus give up his room?"

"Adolphus," replied the lady sharply, "never gives up his room to any one. Poor boy! he is fatigued enough with his military duties."

"Military duties!" echoed the baronet. "Very fatiguing indeed. Rises at twelve—dresses for parade—saunters to his club—rides in the park—dines—is seen at the opera—and, after the campaign of the day, bivouacs for the night in St. James's Square. Poor fellow! he is very much to be pitied."

"Allow me, Sir William," said her ladyship, who invariably proved, in all these little matrimonial discussions, that she was in verity the better half, and the baronet the cipher that added to her value; "pray allow me to arrange my household affairs after my own fashion."

"Oh, certainly."

"You wish your brother to be made comfortable, I presume?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Unless he is so, how long do you suppose he would remain in St. James's Square?"

"Not very long, under any circumstances, I should

suppose, with his fortune ; in all probability he will mount an establishment for himself."

The Lady shook her head impatiently.

" Besides he may marry," urged her husband.

" *Well*," drily exclaimed her ladyship, at the same time regarding her husband with a well-bred stare, which induced the baronet immediately to change the subject.

" Do as you please," he said ; " only remember that Miss Lawrence is here as the friend of Dr. Currey, to whom we are all under such obligations ; and do not let your desire of pleasing my brother, whom you have never seen, render you unmindful of the duties of hospitality."

As the baronet left the room, his son, Captain Adolphus, dressed in a fantastic brocaded satin dressing-gown made his appearance.

Father and son saluted each other coolly, the latter languidly throwing himself upon a sofa near the breakfast-table.

" What in the name of fortune, *ma mère*, made you offer such an unreasonable request as that I should descend to breakfast in this horrid-room—you know I always breakfast in my divan ?"

" Because I wished to speak with you," said the lady, caressingly ; for even the speaker, with all her indulgence of the spoiled puppy, was obliged to sue when she wished to carry any particular point ; " your uncle is hourly expected."

"And how am I supposed to be interested?" asked the young man, with a yawn.

"He is rich," said his mother.

"Why the deuce did he not die in India?" observed the captain, "and why am I to be bored with him?"

"Because you are to be his heir, so you must be very attentive to him."

"What's his fortune?"

"More than two millions."

"*En vérité?* Yes—yes," he added, "I shall be attentive. Two millions! no bad windfall: slow affair. I fear—these old soldiers are so deuced odd. Can't introduce him at mess, though, with all his wealth—couldn't stand the quizzing. Where's Miss Lawrence?"

"Never mind Miss Lawrence, now," said his mamma; "by-the-by, Adolphus, don't make a fool of yourself in that quarter: the girl is pretty, and has a sort of sentimental, Madonna-like style, which I used to find very successful in my youth."

"Did you?" observed her son, with a slight smile; for the speaker's manner was now much more Juno than Madonna-like.

"She evidently tries to pique you by her indifference," added Lady Playwell; "artful thing! I am sure she admires you."

"I should think so."

"Should you be fooled into a marriage?"—

"Marriage!" interrupted Adolphus, with a stare of unfeigned astonishment. "My dear mamma, where

are your wits this morning ? I should have no objection to a little flirtation with the girl in a quiet way ; but as for marriage, the woman who wheedles me out of my liberty must possess other attractions than Miss Lawrence—birth, *ton*, fortune.”

With these words the speakers separated.

CHAPTER XII.

With as small a net as this will I entangle
The largest fish that swims within the lake.
Ay, marry, sirs, and land him too.

OLD PLAY.

MATTHEW SMALL, JUNIOR, ESQUIRE—as he loved to hear himself designated,—found himself very much in the position of a foolish fly, wingbound in the meshes of a spider's web. During the day he was on several different occasions painfully convinced that Marjoram had been as good as his word: he could not leave the office, even for a few minutes, without perceiving that his steps were dogged by some one or other of the police officer's emissaries.

At one corner of the street he encountered a Methodistical looking fellow, dressed in shabby black, distributing tracts, who, as he thrust an "Awful Warning to Sinners;" or "The Death-Bed Made Easy," into his hand, whispered the word "Remember!" and then resumed his occupation.

At another time, when he dropped into a tavern, to stimulate his courage with a glass of brandy, he was followed by a countryman, who, while sipping his ale, kept a sharp look-out upon him.

Matthew was in despair, and abandoned all hope of escape.

"It would be no use," he muttered, "even if I got a start: that infernal telegraph would be set to work, and I should be stopped at the first station."

At one time he thought of confessing all to his father; but he knew the old man's selfish nature: he would much sooner give up his son than abandon the papers—his only hold on Grindem.

Bitterly did the fool curse himself for the act of dishonesty by which he had put himself into the power of the astute police officer.

Finally he resolved to steal the papers: he had no scruples in robbing his father. A second crime is always easier than the first.

As he was returning home in the evening, after having been followed from his usual haunt—the tavern—into the street in which his father lived, by a carman, and a man who would persist in offering him braces, he encountered Marjoram.

As several clerks, merchants, and persons who knew them both were passing at the time, the police officer touched his hat respectfully, and wished him "Good night."

"Good night," said Matthew, hurrying on, for the sound of Marjoram's voice made him nervous.

A low hiss, which made the young scamp's blood run cold, warned him that he was expected to stop; he obeyed with a shudder.

"Well," said the officer, as he overtook him, "have you succeeded?"

"Not yet!" replied Matthew, "not yet!"

"Humph! I don't like playing fast and loose."

"Fast and loose," repeated Small; "what do you mean?"

"What do I mean?" replied Marjoram; "why that you have been trying every dodge to play me false. One of my men met you this morning near the station, another heard you bargaining for a horse and gig to be ready at twelve to-night to take you to Chapel-le-Frith. You bought a road map of England and Wales at Brooks's in High Street, and borrowed ten pounds of your brother Mark, and two of John, together with his watch, under pretence that your own was out of repair."

"How did you know all this?"

"How do I know it?" replied his tormentor, with an air of contempt at his ignorance of the means which his position, as head of the police, placed at his disposal; "how do I know everything which passes in Manchester? But you need not wait at Ball's Lane—I have sent to say you will not want the gig; added to which, two of my men will be there all night, and you may just as well return your brothers the watch and money; they'd be no use to you in Lancaster gaol—prisoners ain't allowed to sell anything."

"By heavens!" exclaimed the terror-stricken youth; "I have given up all hope of getting away. I promise you I won't escape."

"You are very considerate," said the officer, drily; "but my mind is perfectly made easy on that score. *You can't escape*—there are too many eyes upon you for that!"

"Here's old Majorbanks coming," said Matthew, in a tone of vexation, as the gentleman he named, approached within a few paces of the gas-lamp where they were standing.

"Certainly, sir," said Marjoram, aloud, as if continuing their conversation; "I will be sure to attend to your directions."

"Do so, like a good fellow; if you succeed the firm will not forget you. Good evening, Mr. Majorbanks; finished your rubber early!"

The first words, addressed to the officer, were uttered in a loud, patronising tone, on purpose for the gentleman to hear; the latter with an affectation of politeness—for Mr. Majorbanks, who had only that morning returned to Manchester, was one whom all wished to stand well with; and Matthew, who had once met him at a party, had never permitted the casual acquaintance to drop.

"Good night—good night," said the old gentleman, drily, and passed on.

"I am sure he suspects something," said Small, with an air of mortification, "seeing me with you: he generally stops to shake hands and chat."

This was a lie. Marjoram knew it, and did not hesitate to tell him so; but even in the degraded posi-

will do; profit by the lesson: it's not often I give such gentle ones. And now to business: how and when am I to receive the papers?"

Matthew reflected for a few moments before he answered; perhaps also to hide the tear of mortified vanity and pride at the bitter humiliation he had just received.

"You know the governor's house?" he demanded.

"Which governor's?"

"My father's, of course."

"Yes."

"The third window on the ground floor opens into his study."

"He is speaking truth now," thought Marjoram, who had taken care to acquaint himself thoroughly with the locality, and knew that Small, senior, kept his papers there.

"You must have some one on whom you can rely walking up and down before the window all night," continued Small.

"I'll be there myself," observed the officer.

"I cannot fix the hour: sometimes the old man retires early—sometimes it's very late. As soon as you hear me open the shutter, approach, and we will exchange packets: I will give you the papers you require, and you shall give me the letter and that infernal note."

"Agreed," said his companion—"that is, *after I have examined them?*"

The speaker noted the change which appeared on Matthew's countenance, and saw that the young scamp's last hope of deceiving him was gone.

The experienced thief-taker could not avoid a smile at the idea of his attempting to dupe an old hand like himself. He knew what *dummies* meant, as well as the most expert cracksman or ringer of changes in town.

"Of course when you have examined them," repeated Small, trying to look unconcerned.

"And now, my fine spark, a few words before we separate. There's nothing like plain speaking. I know that you are up to a thing or two, and so am I; it's no use trying either to ring the changes or escape. The house is watched both back and front; and if by six o'clock the papers are not in my possession, by eight you shall be under lock and key for robbery and breach of trust."

"I thought," faltered the young man, "you intended to give me two days?"

"I did, perhaps, at first," replied Marjoram, "but I've altered my mind. You are a slippery cove, and there's no trusting you. If you had the pluck to do it, you'd cut your throat to escape me; but I know you are a coward as well as a liar; so I am quite easy on that score. Now then," he added, brutally, "in with you at once, I must see you caged. And remember—the papers or Lancaster gaol."

Matthew shuddered; his spirit was completely subdued by the determined tone in which the officer spoke,

whose object throughout the conversation had evidently been to work upon his terrors; and the humbled tone of his victim told him that he had completely succeeded.

But Marjoram had no wish to degrade him unnecessarily in the eyes of others, for on two or three young men approaching just as they parted, he raised his hat, and wished him "Good night" in as respectful a tone as if he had been addressing the Commissioner of Police himself.

"Good night, Marjoram," replied the young man, in a careless, off-hand way, and directed his steps towards the house.

The young men whose approach caused the apparent civility of the officer, turned out to be three clerks—companions of Matthew—who had heard of the orgies and row at the police office the preceding night; they were not the least surprised, therefore, at seeing Small and Sweet Marjoram, as they nick-named the thief-taker, together.

"Hollo, Mat," said one; "been paying a fine?"

"Tipping for last night?" demanded another.

"Something like it. The fact is, I got into an infernal row—drank too much wine. The fellow was civil, and so I just gave him a sovereign. When one has a position in the world," he added, with his usual fatuity, "it does not do to be seen in these cases—must keep up the respectability of the firm; besides the governor is so particular."

"Out of business, of course," observed one of the clerks, who perfectly understood the nature of the commercial transactions of Grindem, Small, and Company, and could not resist the opportunity of a fling at his old companion, whose assumption of dignity annoyed him; added to which, he had not been invited to the party the preceding evening.

"Both in and out of business," replied Matthew, who perfectly understood him.

Although at most times inclined for dissipation, the present position of his affairs did not permit his indulging the natural depravity of his taste.

He pleaded a headache as an excuse for leaving them, and with a heavy heart entered the house.

The night was destined to be an important one to him.

Small, senior, had taken care that the various reports touching the death of old Gridley should reach the ears of his partner, over whom he exercised, although in a less offensive manner, the same species of terror which the police officer had found so effective with his son.

On the evening of Matthew's encounter, Grindem, who was completely spirit-broken and subdued, called upon his persecutor. Despite the promise of his agent, and the large sum he had offered, he felt little hope of being able to obtain the papers; and he fancied that there was something soothing to his pride in yielding before the time fixed for his decision.

He thought that he was exercising his free will ; but it was a delusion : the wretched man was only yielding to his terrors.

" I have come, Small," he began, as soon as they were seated in the private room of the former, " to announce my determination."

" Happy to hear it," observed his partner, doubting, from the suddenness of the decision, what that determination might be.

" It is to marry your daughter."

A smile passed over the little man's fox-like countenance : it was the crowning of his hopes, the last act of his triumph over the wealthy, insolent Gilbert—who for so many years had treated him like a dog, wantonly wounded his pride, and humbled him before the very porters of the firm.

" You have chosen wisely—very wisely," he remarked. " It is not on every man I would bestow such a treasure as my child."

" Not unless he was rich," thought Grindem.

" Ah, she has a heart."

" Deuced unlike her father, then," mentally added his partner.

" This union not only cements our interests, but makes us friends. Henceforth, no more bickerings—no recriminations—but one happy family. What settlements do you propose !"

" I think you might leave that to my affection," observed the merchant.

"Doubtless—doubtless," drily answered the father of the intended bride. "My daughter's pure, disinterested nature would revolt at any such a thought. But I, as a man of the world, must see that she does not suffer in her worldly position. Life is so uncertain. Should you die intestate?"

"Do I look like a dying man?" growled Grindem.

"Decidedly not," said Small; "but still such things do occur as sudden deaths."

"Well, well," impatiently exclaimed the merchant, who, having conquered his repugnance so far as to consent to the marriage, cared little for the rest; "what do you propose?"

"You are very rich," observed Small, fixing his eyes upon him with a look very like that with which a fox may be supposed to regard a fat stubble goose which it had stealthily approached.

"Not so rich as you imagine."

"You would not think five thousand a year too much?"

"Five thousand furies!" roared the merchant. "What should I see in your daughter to settle such a sum upon her? Does she bring fortune?—No. Family?—No. Beauty or accomplishments?—No."

"She brings better than either—virtue!"

"Psha! we know its value: won't fetch a shilling in the market."

"*And safety*," added Small, with a significant look. Grindem was silent.

"Yes," continued his partner, "five thousand a year in the event of your death, and two thousand a year pin-money during your life, will do. The offer is at once worthy of your generous disposition and my daughter's merits."

The old man groaned in the bitterness of his rage; he cursed the wealth for which he had toiled and toiled. Of what use was it now? It only served to make him a greater dupe to his unprincipled partner, who scarcely took the trouble to conceal the contempt which he felt for his victim.

In his fury he could have torn his very flesh from his bones, to think how he was humbled and subdued.

At times he thought of suicide; but the dread, the mysterious horror of the grave, withheld his hand. Not that he enjoyed or cared for life, but that he feared to die. Had he been assured of annihilation he would have welcomed it with pleasure, and smiled at the disappointed malice of his taskmaster—for such his late drudge had suddenly become.

"What say you?" demanded Small, impatiently.

"E'en as you please. Draw up what you please. I'll sign."

The little man rose from his chair, and shook him warmly by the hand.

Grindem at first recoiled from his touch as he would have done from contact with a serpent. But a fierce look from Small recalled him to himself, and he

returned the pressure with a nervousness which showed how much the effort cost him.

"Will you see my daughter?" demanded the father of the young lady whose interest he had so quickly discussed.

"Not to night," replied Gilbert hurriedly. "You can announce the arrangement to her. I dare say," he added, bitterly, "it will not take her by surprise."

"Of course not, after your late attentions. Still, it would only be becoming if you saw her yourself. But just as you please," he added, struck by the livid expression of his partner's countenance, and prudently foregoing for once his plan of torturing him. "Perhaps it may be as well to spare her blushes and your gallantry on the occasion. I will leave her mother to break the intelligence to her."

"As you please."

"When shall we sign the settlements?" added Small, bluntly.

"As soon as your lawyer has drawn them up."

"I shall name myself trustee for my child."

"Anyone you like," exclaimed Grindem, catching up his hat, and rushing from the house, more with the air of a madman than a bridegroom. "Name the fiend himself, for he is a fitting guardian to a trust like ours."

"This is pleasure," muttered Small, as he cast a triumphant glance after his victim. "Real enjoyment! Talk of the luxury of wealth, love, friendship, or rank

—they are poor in comparison with the luxury of hate. Wine is not half so intoxicating. I'll not spare him a pang," he added, "he never spared me in his pride. He trampled on me—I'll humble him to the dust—strip him of his wealth—brand his name, and leave him to die like a dog, alone, alone! and that, in a mercantile phrase, will be a settlement in full for the long, weary years of cringing and insult I submitted to. I often thought he would one day pay me."

The speaker, with all his foresight and calculation, was doomed to be deceived. The punishment of his partner was in Higher Hands. The sinner had been weighed in the balance of eternal justice, and judgment was ready to be pronounced.

As Grindem rushed from the house of his partner he encountered Matthew Small, who was returning home after his interview with Marjoram.

The old man, in his impotent anger, dashed rudely past him, and continued his course without a word.

His manner gave the young man subject for reflection, and confirmed him in his intention of keeping faith with the police officer; for he felt convinced that the merchant must have pretty good grounds for indulging his humour before he ventured to treat him so.

"It must be done," he muttered. "There's no help for it."

It was past two in the morning when the young scamp softly crept from his room and descended the staircase leading to the study. He was without either

shoes or stockings, so fearful was he of making the least noise to alarm the family.

He had waited till all was hushed in the house, except the snorings of his father, whose respiratory organs rivalled the ticking of the clock upon the landing-place, only they were not quite so regular.

Matthew had armed himself with one of the large chisels used in the warehouse for forcing open the packing cases, and a wooden mallet.

He knew that any attempt to force or pick the lock would be hopeless: but that one of the panels at the back of the secretary might without any great difficulty be cut out.

As Matthew cautiously opened the door of the study, the low creaking noise of the hinges terrified him.

He started at the shadows which the flickering candle cast upon the wall, and his heart beat violently.

For awhile he lacked courage to proceed; not that the crime of robbing his father appalled him—it was the fear of detection.

“I must do it,” he murmured, as the slow and measured tread of Marjoram, who was on the watch outside the house, fell upon his ear. “That devil has me in his power, and if I fail to-night, he will fulfil his threats of a prison in the morning. Oh! what a laughing-stock shall I become to the young swells and clerks upon whom I wasted my ill-gotten money! A felon at the bar of justice! Anything but that.”

At times he half-repented of his design, and seriously

considered whether he had better not wake his father, and confess everything to him. He knew the hold he possessed over his partner, and thought that he might trust to that to save him ; but then the proofs were in the hands of the police-officer, and his father had no influence over him. The resolution vanished.

While he was thus debating with himself, a low tap at the window informed him that Marjoram was becoming impatient.

As gently as his trembling hands would permit, he raised the sash, and unbarred one of the shutters. As he pushed it open, the face of the police-officer was visible. He had evidently been listening to his movements.

"Now," whispered Marjoram, "lose no more time. I have been waiting two hours already."

"Directly," faltered Matthew ; "but I must proceed quietly. My father sleeps overhead, and the least noise disturbs him. Go on the opposite side of the way, and if you see a light struck in the room overhead, inform me."

"Dispatch, then, and get the papers."

"I will—I will."

"Stay," said the officer ; "how do you intend to procure them?"

"By forcing the lid of the secretary."

"That will never do," replied the experienced thief-taker ; "turn the piece of furniture gently round—the back is of common deal."

"How should you know that?" demanded the young man, whose teeth began to chatter, partly through fear and partly from the night air, which blew keenly through the half-opened window.

"How do I know everything?" growled the officer. "Here," he added, at the same time placing in Matthew's hand an instrument well known to burglars, and commonly called a "jemmy;" "insert this gently between the panels; when in about an inch and a half, turn it to the right and then to the left. A few turns will do the job. As soon as the wood is started, insert your hand, and draw the panel out."

"But I don't see, even then, how I am to get the packet."

"Because you are a fool," growled Marjoram. "Didn't I tell you it was in the secret drawer at the bottom of the well? Dispatch! It will soon be daylight, and then it will be too late."

"I can't," groaned Matthew—"indeed I can't. If money will content you"—

"Money! How should you get money, unless by robbing old Grindem again? I am in no humour for fooling. The papers to-night, or a prison in the morning."

These last words decided the wretched youth.

With desperate courage he took the implement, and stealthily advanced towards the secretary.

Fortunately it moved on castors, so that he had no great difficulty in turning it round; then following the

directions he had received, he began to insert the jemmy between the panels.

His heart beat wildly as the dry wood cracked.

"Curse the coward!" said the officer to himself. "What a noise he makes! The last fellow who used the instrument would have had it open in half the time."

Again there was a pause, and then a noise like the splitting of a board.

The cold drops of perspiration stood upon the brow of Matthew Small.

"Opened at last," thought Marjoram, whose experienced ear enabled him to follow the whole proceeding as well as if he had witnessed it.

"My dear," exclaimed Mrs. Small, starting from her sleep, and shaking her husband; "don't you hear a noise?"

"Only your tongue," grumbled her drowsy partner, who had been kept awake by her schemes and plans, and only just got off to his first sleep.

"There again!" said the lady.

"Pooh! You are always fancying some foolish thing or another."

For a few minutes the lady remained silent. It was possible, she thought, that she might be deceived. At last the sound of the creaking panel, as Matthew wrenched it from its place, convinced her that her suspicions were well founded.

"I tell you, Small," she exclaimed, shaking him

violently, "that some one is in the house. I can hear them distinctly in the room below."

"What should they do there? Only the cats."

"Remember the papers."

Had a cannon been discharged close to his ear, it could not have roused her husband more effectually.

The papers! They were his fortune—his hold on Grindem.

With something which sounded very like an oath he started from the bed, and, thrusting his arms into his dressing-gown, prepared to descend.

"Take a candle," said his wife."

"What for—to alarm the thieves, if there are any? No, this will be better."

With these words he caught up a pistol from the chimney-piece, examined if it was capped, assured himself of the fact, and began gently to descend the staircase.

Mrs. Small was a prudent woman, and thought if anything happened to her husband it would be advisable for one of the heads to be left to look after the interests of the family; so she double-locked and bolted the door, and stood listening to the result.

Meanwhile, Marjoram had become impatient, and his whispered threats and even curses through the half-opened window, only served to render Matthew more nervous than the act he was engaged in would otherwise have made him.

"I have them," he faltered, making his way to the window. "I have them."

Without a word the officer snatched them, together with the jemmy, from his trembling hands; assured himself by the light of his lantern that they were all right, and satisfied that such was the case, thrust them into his bosom.

"Good night," he whispered, coolly; "close the shutter."

"But the note—the letter."

"Call at the office in the morning, and you shall have them."

"But you promised me them now."

"Did I?" said Marjoram, with a sneer; "well, I have altered my mind. 'Hark,'" he added, for his quick ear caught the sound of a hand upon the door; "there's some one coming—good night."

With these words he took to his heels, and rapidly disappeared down the street.

The door of the study was carefully opened. Matthew turned round in terror. Fear caused him to drop the candle; so that, when his father entered the room, he only saw the outline of a human being near the half-closed window.

To level and fire was the act of an instant, and the guilty son fell with a deep groan, severely wounded, by the hand of his no less guilty father.

"So I've done for him," thought Small; "but first to prevent his comrades, if he has any, from rendering him assistance—I wonder if it's Grindem?"

With these words, he approached the window, and

carefully fastened the shutter ; then made the best of his way back to his bed-room to procure a light. Not to make a noise in his descent, he had come down barefooted, and his feet left the trace of blood, not only on the carpet, but the stairs.

As he reached the landing, one or two doors were opened ; the report of the pistol had alarmed the sleepers.

Mrs. Small was screaming for help, and a thousand murders.

"Silence," said her husband ; "it's all right ; there is nothing the matter—only those infernal cats."

This assurance quieted the ladies, and Mark and John returned to their beds, laughing at the governor's exploit.

"What has happened ?" demanded Mrs. Small.

"I have shot the robber."

The lady was about to renew her screams, but her husband's look restrained her.

"Give me the light," he said, taking the one she had lit on his departure from her trembling hand, "and come with me."

Mrs. Small was a woman of nerve, and cautiously followed her helpmate down the stairs.

Still she could not repress a shudder at the foot-prints which were marked in blood upon the carpet.

On entering the lower room, a groan startled them both.

Matthew, who had received the ball in his neck, had

found sufficient strength to raise himself from the floor and stagger to a chair.

"Matthew!" exclaimed his father.

"My son!" shrieked the wretched mother. "Oh, Small, what have you done?"

"Say rather what has he done?" replied the husband, pointing furiously at the same time to the broken secretary. "Robbed me of those papers—sold me to old Grindem for gold! Fool! he has lost a fortune."

His wife, true to that instinct which even in the most degraded state seldom fails a mother's heart, had hastily torn part of her night-dress to staunch the wound of her son.

"Marjoram—papers," groaned Matthew.

"God!" said Mrs. Small, "the boy is dying."

By their united aid Matthew was taken up-stairs, and placed upon their own bed, and a surgeon, upon whose discretion they knew they could rely, sent for to dress his wound.

He pronounced it dangerous, but not necessarily fatal.

"'Tis well," groaned Small, after a pause, during which he had been cogitating how to proceed. "Wife, I have been outwitted, but not defeated. Early in the morning dress yourself in your best; proceed quietly with your daughter to the church—mind, not an instant later than eleven. I shall join you."

"And what are we to do there?" demanded Mrs. Small.

“ Witness Grindem’s marriage with our child.”

“ My dear, so sudden—no dress ready.”

“ Curse the dress ! better that she should be married to the wealthy villain in rags than let the prize escape her: she will never get such another chance.”

“ But should he refuse ? ”

“ He hangs like a dog ! ” replied her husband, savagely.

CHAPTER XIII.

Man proposes—heaven disposes. Thus
Human cunning often is defeated,
E'en when the harvest sown by crime
Is ripe, and only waits the gathering.

AT his usual hour, Mr. Small, with a face as calm as if nothing had occurred to disturb his usual serenity, walked leisurely to the office.

Previous to leaving his home, he had given directions to his wife and daughter to be at the church punctually at eleven; he felt that the game was sliding from his hand, that he had lost the winning card, and that a bold stroke was the only thing left to retrieve him.

Just as he reached Cannon Street he encountered Mr. Marjoram, making his way to the office; both were dissemblers in their way, and they bowed as if they had neither of them had the slightest rancour against the other.

“You are out early,” observed the merchant.

“Why, yes, it is rather early; but I have business of importance,” replied the police-officer, with a smile which he could not repress; for the thought of the large reward he had so cleverly won gladdened him, to

say nothing of the pleasure of turning the tables on the man who had outwitted him.

"A police-case?" said Small, carelessly.

"Not exactly, although it may end in that. Do you think," added the man, "that I shall find Mr. Grindem within?"

"*Not before twelve*; he has been very unwell lately, and seldom comes to the office; but if your business lies with him, you had better ride over to his place—it is only four miles on the Chapel-le-Frith Road. From his appearance last night, I question if we shall see him in town to-day."

Although the speaker's heart trembled with rage and mortification, he uttered the words as blandly and with an air as unconcerned as if he had been uninterested in the matter.

Experienced as he was in reading both the countenances and the intentions of men, for once in his life Marjoram was deceived; he, too, had observed the fearful change which the last two days had made in the appearance of the wealthy merchant, and thought it not unlikely that Small was speaking the truth; besides, he risked nothing, since the papers were in his possession, safely buttoned in the lining of his coat; he could feel them next his heart, which beat more quickly when he thought of his success and its recompense.

"Thank you," he said; "I think I will ride over."

"It is of consequence, then?" observed Small, with well-affected uneasiness.

"Yes."

"To the firm?"

"No; to him."

"You had better wait," said the little man; "he is sure to be in town by twelve—you may miss him?"

"Not likely—I know the road; good morning."

And thus the two plotters separated. No sooner had Marjoram turned the corner of the street than Small quickened his steps. He knew that Grindem was already at the office, and that his only chance of accomplishing the marriage was in preventing the interview between him and the police officer.

"Neither I nor Mr. Grindem are visible to any one," he whispered to Mark and John, who were seated as usual at the desk; "If Marjoram calls, say my partner has not arrived yet—you understand?"

The two youths nodded, as much as to say, "All right."

"Now then," said the little man, as he laid his hand upon the door of the private room, "for the last battle; I shall defeat him yet."

Grindem was pacing up and down his gloomy apartment, like a panther in its den; his restless eyes were bloodshot, and the distended veins of his temples and neck started like cords from his pale, waxy skin.

His nervousness had fearfully increased—the least sound startled him—his sleep was broken by hideous dreams.

Already he felt a foretaste of the punishment which sooner or later visits crimes like his.

“Now!” he exclaimed, with a look of disappointment, for he had been expecting intelligence from Marjoram. “Has anything occurred that you come so early?”

Small quietly closed the door.

“For heaven’s sake, speak out,” added the unhappy man; “what has happened?”

“Not what you expected,” replied his partner, coolly; “the papers are safe—quite safe—although an attempt was made last night to rob my house.”

“Indeed!” said Gilbert, trying to look as unconcerned as possible.

“In repulsing the robbers my eldest son was wounded, perhaps fatally. Do you hear, man of crime and blood—another murder lies at your door?”

“At mine?” faltered the merchant.

“At whose else?” fiercely demanded Small; “think you that I am ignorant of your tampering with Marjoram—your bribes and underhand attempts? but they are defeated—defeated, sir! and this very hour, unless you fulfil your promise and wed my daughter, I shall place you in the hands of the magistrates: joined with the late proceedings of your infamous confederate, Crab, they will hang you, and I shall be revenged. Hang

you like a dog! The wealthy Gilbert Grindem on a gibbet! rare sport for his enemies, and no regret to his friends, for he has none."

"Not one!" sighed the wretch, in an agony of terror; "but you are wrong—I swear to you you are wrong—I knew nothing of the attempt."

"Psha!"

"I will take any oath you please."

"Oath!" repeated Small, in a tone of bitter contempt; "propose such security to those who do not know you. Why your whole life has been one incarnate lie! The only trace of humanity I ever discovered in your selfish disposition was your love for your puppy of a nephew; and him you sacrificed at the dictates of pride, like a heartless fool! Oaths—pscha! it would cost you as little to break as to make them. You forget how long I have known you!"

"Say how long have we known each other!"

"As you will. If I have been a rogue, it was from necessity; you are a villain from choice. Poverty—iron poverty—left me no other means of rising from the dust; the dust in which you all your life have grovelled, has been of gold! But I have no time to lose either in reproaches or threats. My wife and daughter by this time are at the church; meet them there in half-an-hour. Mark me," he added, "half-an-hour at the latest. If once the clock strikes eleven, and the knot is untied, I denounce you as the spoiler of the orphan."

"I can defend myself, or at the worst restore the accursed wealth."

"As the murderer of Gridley!" continued Small, with increased vehemence. "Can you bid the life-stream flow once more in the poor old victim's heart, give light to his eyes, voice to his tongue, thought to his drugged brain? Restitution! psha! it comes too late. Repentance will not save you from the gallows! Mordaunt and two fellows are deputed by commission from the Chancellor to make inquiry into the treatment of the old man in the asylum to which your well-planned scheme consigned him. Think you it will stop at the scanty heap of earth thrown upon his coffin?"

"I had no hand in his death; they can prove nothing."

"At present, perhaps not," said his partner, coolly; "but with these papers to guide them"—and he touched the pocket-book in the inside of his waistcoat, as if to indicate that they were still there—"the clue would not be difficult to follow."

"You promised me two more days?"

"Not two hours now."

"One?"

"Not an instant!" fiercely shouted the little man. "This hour sees you the husband of my daughter, or in a gaol!"

"It's impossible," exclaimed Grindem, wringing his hands. "No banns have yet been published."

Small took from his pocket a special license, and laid it on the table.

His partner felt, as his eye glanced over it, that his last hope was gone.

"See," said Small, "how careful I have been of your happiness. The bride is ready—the clergyman is ready. Decide," he added, taking out his watch. "It is now five minutes past ten: if, when the clock strikes eleven, the knot is untied, I denounce you! You can't escape, for I have set those you dream not of to watch you."

"One word—name any sum you please?"

Small turned from him, and left the room. He saw, from the terrified manner of his victim, that he should succeed; and he hastened to the church, to assure himself that his wife and daughter were already there.

Once more left to himself, Grindem gave way to the long pent-up fury which was consuming him.

The thought that he, the wealthy, envied merchant, should be dragged into a marriage with a girl whom he detested, by the manœuvres of his drudge—tool—was madness to him; and yet he saw no other means of safety.

Small's threat was not an idle one: the papers once placed in the hands of Mordaunt or the magistrates, would form a link in the chain of evidence, and connect him with the death of his late clerk.

In imagination, Grindem saw the finger of scorn

pointed at him—heard the yells of the mob hissing in his ears—and the distended veins of his throbbing temples became more and more gorged with his fevered blood.

“I must yield,” he exclaimed; “chain myself to a loathsome, affected being,—give her my name, my wealth. Oh, that I had listened to the old man’s proposition—a marriage between Amy and Henry would have healed all! It was the last chance which the Angel of Mercy held out to me, and, like a fool, I dashed it from me. I would give half—more—all my accursed wealth, could I but recall the past.”

Had he known that the papers were in the hands of his agent Marjoram, the feelings of the speaker would have been widely different: armed with them, he could have defied and crushed his partner; and his remorse would have been as short-lived as his fears.

At this instant the clock in the adjoining office struck a quarter past ten.

“No time for hesitation,” he muttered, “or for reflection; I must go—dragged like a beast to the shambles. This is my wedding-day—I must endure the congratulations and smiles of my false friends—the sneers of my enemies; see the lurking smile of Small at the completion of his triumph; bear the insolent familiarity of his sons. My sin at last has found me.”

With a desperate air the wretched man advanced towards the sideboard, and eagerly drained off a

tumbler of brandy, to give himself nerve to go through the task ; the stimulant revived him.

Pulling his hat over his scowling brow, he rang the bell. Young Mark Small answered it.

" My carriage," growled the merchant.

" Is at the door," replied the young man, with a triumphant grin ; for he knew the purpose for which it was ordered.

" Well, I shall soon be back. Tell the coachman to turn the horses' heads towards the church—do you hear—the church ?"

Mark left the room to execute the order.

Grindem hastily swallowed a second tumbler of brandy, and left the office more with the air of a man summoned to the scaffold, than like a bridegroom on his wedding-day.

" All right," observed the youngest of the Smalls, as the merchant drove off ; " the bear is muzzled."

" Or soon will be. Leave the governor alone ; he knows what he is at I say, Jack."

" Well."

" Don't you wish it was your wedding-day ? I don't think you'd make such a face as old Grindem does ; why, he looks as if he was going to be hanged, instead of married."

" Pooh ! his wife will soon tame him. Marriage is like a cold bath—it's no use to stand shivering on the brink. One plunge, and it's over."

On the evening preceding the day which was to

decide the fate of Grindem, and make him the son-in-law of Small, there had been a private meeting of the principal magistrates of the town.

Lizzy, Tim's Dick, and the Widow Bentley had been examined: their evidence, and the testimony of Mordaunt and his learned friend, decided the bench upon issuing their warrant for exhuming the remains of the old clerk; and at an early hour on the following morning the party proceeded to the churchyard.

Secret as the proceedings had been kept, rumours had spread amongst the neighbours and friends of Gridley of foul play; and, much to the annoyance of those who conducted the painful ceremony, a large crowd were assembled to witness it.

When the coffin was opened, and the body disclosed to their gaze, murmurs broke from the mob, and a cry of "Foul play!" was loudly raised.

"Ay," said the little weaver, dashing aside a tear; "I knew so. Grindem and Crab have much to answer for."

These incautious words spread like wildfire.

The merchant had never been liked by the poorer classes, for whom he showed little sympathy. He was known to be a hard man, proud of his wealth, and little scrupulous as to the means by which he acquired it; nor was the keeper of the madhouse much more popular.

Anxious to avoid anything in the shape of a demonstration, the assistants placed the remains in a hearse,

and drove slowly towards the Infirmary, where the necessary examination was to be made in the presence of the principal medical authorities, who on this occasion had summoned Doctor Currey to their aid. The crowd followed it.

As the procession moved slowly along the High Street, it encountered a carriage driven furiously along; it was Grindem's.

The clock had just struck the half-hour, and in his terror at being too late, he thrust his head from the window, and imperiously ordered the coachman to drive on.

"It's a funeral, sir," replied the man, respectfully, "and the carts have stopped the way."

"Drive on!" roared his master.

At this moment the speaker caught the eye of Mr. Mordaunt, who was following in his carriage.

He knew him personally, and the interest he had taken in the affair of poor Gridley. A chill of terror struck his heart.

"Drive on!" repeated Tim's Dick; "ay, drive on as fast as you will, but justice will overtake you, though you strew the road with your ill-gotten wealth."

"What means the fellow?" faltered the merchant.

"It's Mr. Gridley's body, sir," whispered the footman, who had received the information from a friend in the crowd; "they say there has been foul play, and the magistrates have ordered it to be taken up. There's a doctor come from London to examine it."

By this time the idle and the curious who followed the hearse recognised the wealthy Mr. Grindem, and a low hiss was commenced. It rang in the ears of the wretched man like the signal of his condemnation.

"What do they mean?" he faltered.

The footman was silent: he dared not repeat the words which he had caught from the mob; he stood too much in awe of his imperious master.

"It means," shouted Tim, "that murder will out! that gold wrung from the starving mechanic will not hide the crime of blood. It means"—

"Drive on!" exclaimed Grindem, dashing down the blind of the carriage; "I have no time to listen to the ravings of a fool or knave."

Fortunately for the speaker a body of police happened to pass at the moment, or the excitement of the people might have proved dangerous.

At present, it was true, nothing more than a vague suspicion existed; but that, coupled with the unpopularity of the merchant, would have justified the crowd, in their own eyes, in proceeding to something more than an expression of opinion.

By the efforts of the police, the carts were drawn on one side, and the carriage rolled rapidly towards the church.

In the fine old College Church of Manchester, Small, with his wife and daughter, were waiting the arrival of the bridegroom. The ladies were both nervous and discontented.

Miss Small had calculated upon a brilliant wedding-day—upon mortifying her friends by her splendid alliance; and the hum-drum way in which it was to be celebrated was a severe disappointment to her pride.

Mrs. Small felt anxious for her son: the state in which she had left him alarmed her. Cold, selfish, and calculating as she was, she was a mother.

There is generally one trace of Eden to be found even in the most vicious heart.

"Strange the bridegroom does not come," observed the clergyman, with a scarcely suppressed yawn.

"He will be here," observed Small, drily.

"The half-hour has struck," added the clerk.

"*He will be here*," repeated the little man, with an air of certainty. He knew that his victim durst not fail.

At this moment the sound of a carriage, driven rapidly along, was heard.

"I told you so," said Small, with a triumphant smile. "Compose yourself, my love," he added, addressing his daughter: "nothing has occurred. Mrs. S., look to the dear child, whilst I go and receive the bridegroom."

The dear child, who had seen at least her three-and-thirtieth summer, would have affected all the nervous trepidation usual with young ladies on such solemn occasions, had there been any of her friends to witness her delicate distress; but as there were only the

clergyman and his clerk, besides her mother, present—for even the pew-openers had been excluded—she spared herself the trouble, mentally resolving to repay her present mortification by the splendour of her wedding tour, and the brilliant parties she would give on her return to Manchester.

As Small reached the porch of the church, the carriage drew up.

“I knew so,” he muttered; “the old rogue dared not disappoint me. Now let Marjoram restore the papers: I have him, hand and foot, bound in my power.”

How often do we see that, by a wise dispensation of Providence, the purpose for which we have sinned is balked at the very moment of success; that all our plottings and calculations have been in vain; that a Hand Divine, at the last moment, snatches the prize for which we have toiled from our impatient grasp, just as fortune places it within our reach.

With a smile of triumph on his lips, Small opened the carriage-door, and started back in horror.

Grindem was a corpse—a fit of apoplexy had anticipated the doom which human justice, sooner or later, must have pronounced. The fierce struggle of his passions had destroyed him.

“What’s the matter, sir?” demanded the astonished footman, into whose arms Small staggered.

“Dead!” groaned the little man; “dead.”

“Who? my master? perhaps it’s only a fit, sir?”

"Run for a doctor!" roared Small; "stay—lend me a knife, I'll bleed him; coachman," he added, "a knife—a fleam—anything to bleed him; curse the old villain," he muttered; "he has escaped me."

By the assistance of the pew-openers, who were gathered outside the church, the body of Grindem was carried into the vestry, and a man was sent off to the nearest surgeon.

Vinegar, salts, were applied, but all in vain; no sign of life responded to the interested attentions of the distracted bride and her mother.

"What's the girl howling for?" demanded her father, ferociously. "Beat his hands."

At this moment a rapid step was heard advancing up the aisle.

"Thank heaven!" said Mrs. Small, "here is medical assistance at last."

The door of the vestry was opened, and Marjoram, who had learnt too late the trick which Small had played him, in a state of profuse perspiration, entered the place.

His countenance changed terribly at the sight of the body; it was ten thousand pounds lost to him for ever.

"Dead!" he exclaimed.

"Ay," said Small, with a savage scowl, "dead. You've missed your reward."

"And you your prey," returned the officer, in an under-tone. "I know whose loss is the greatest."

A surgeon soon after arrived, but, on the first view of the body, pronounced life to be extinct; yielding, however, to Small's entreaties, he opened the temporal artery; a few drops of thick blood oozed slowly from the orifice.

"Cut deeper," said Small.

"I tell you, sir, it is useless—he is dead," said the surgeon. "The brain is gorged with blood; look how black it is."

"It comes from his heart, then," said Small, with a look of rage—"it comes from his heart."

Mentally cursing his late partner, he took his wife and daughter (who was too much alarmed at her father's manner to venture on a fainting fit) under his arm. He made his way to the carriage, and directed the man to drive them home.

"But my poor master," said the man, who had lived with the deceased many years, and for whom, despite his surly temper, he felt a sort of fidelity and attachment.

"Leave him—the devil has got his own at last."

"Has he?" said the coachman. "Then he may drive you and your precious daughter home, for he may take me as well if I do."

The poor fellow was resolute; and as the crowd began to gather, Small, to avoid a scene, placed the ladies in a hackney coach and drove home.

In the bitterness of his disappointment, he could not help exclaiming repeatedly—

“If the fool had only lived an hour longer—an hour longer.”

Both wife and daughter mentally repeated the wish.

“Humph!” said Marjoram, as he scowled after the party. “You think yourself a cunning man, Mr. Small; but I have not done with you yet. The papers at least are in my possession, and he shall pay well who gets them. You have played a deep game with me. The first trick is yours,—but the second shall be mine.”

With these words the police-officer elbowed his way through the crowd which was gathered round the church-porch, and made the best of his way to the counting-house of William Bowles.

CHAPTER XIV.

This even-handed justice commends
The ingredients of the poisoned chalice
To our lips. SHAKESPEARE.

OUR young friend Bowles was busily occupied on Change, when a man thrust a note into his hands—it was from Mr. Briand, the banker, requesting to see him on the instant upon most important business.

“What the deuce can he want with me?” said the young man. “We have no acceptances out; and even if we had, the house is ready to meet them.”

Hastily concluding his business, he jumped into a cab, and drove to the bank.

He was immediately ushered into the private room, where he found Mr. Small, his countenance pale with rage and mortification, discussing angrily with the head of the firm.

“And this is your resolution?” said the little man.

“It is my duty,” replied the banker. “I have no choice. But here comes the other executor—you can appeal to him.”

“Executor,” thought William, who had not yet

heard of Grindem's death. "What the deuce does he mean?"

"My dear sir, you have arrived most opportunely," said Mr. Briand, shaking him warmly by the hand. "Sad affair!—shocking—very shocking! Pray sit down."

He had not invited Small to take a seat.

"What affair?" demanded the young man, more and more mystified.

"Have you not heard?"

"I've heard nothing. What does it mean?"

"It means that Grindem is dead," said Small, hoarsely; "and it seems that the old fool has made a will, leaving everything to your friend, Henry Beacham, and that you and Mr. Briand are joint executors."

Bowles was greatly shocked, and remained silent from surprise.

"Just as he was on the point of marriage, too, with my daughter, upon whom he had made most liberal settlements. He doted on her."

"Did he?"

"The old man, it seems, has left directions that the affairs of the firm should be wound up. A fortune thrown away. It will be my ruin—several magnificent affairs in hand—fifty per cent, at least; and Mr. Briand refuses to advance the funds to carry them out."

"Mr. Briand," said William, gravely, "doubtless

knows his duty ; as I shall mine," he added, "when I perfectly understand the position in which I am so unexpectedly placed, and learn the wishes of the late Mr. Grindem."

At this moment the banker was called out by one of the partners, and Small and the junior executor were left alone.

The former advanced close to the young man, and laying his hand upon his arm, whispered—

"I have something to propose to you."

William nodded, as much as to say, "Proceed."

"The profits of the house are enormous! Cent per cent at least. Walk down with me to the office and examine the books. Let me have the necessary funds for carrying on the concern only for six months, and you shall share."

Had anything been wanting to decide the noble-hearted fellow to reject Small's application for funds, it would have been the infamous proposal he had just made.

The thought of tampering with the wishes of the dead, and risking the fortune of his friend Henry, were sufficiently revolting to him ; but the idea of profiting by the breach of trust roused his indignation, and he rejected the proffered bribe with scorn.

"I can blast the old man's character," added Small.

"The dead," said William, gravely, "must bear the reputation which their deeds have merited. If you

have anything to urge touching the interests or honour of Henry Beacham, I am prepared to listen to you."

"When can I see you? Answer quickly, the banker is returning."

"This evening, at my office," said Bowles, hastily.

On the return of Mr. Briand the will was read.

The instructions were so precise, that it left neither of the executors the option of acting otherwise than as the deceased had directed.

As mercantile men, both the banker and William felt it hard that the prospects of the junior partner should be so suddenly blasted; but they had no choice.

Had they been able to penetrate his intentions, they would have commended the prudent foresight which defeated them.

"I have but one chance," thought Small, as he left the bank. "To save his friend's honour he may consent. Those infernal papers—if they were once more in my possession, all might be arranged to my wishes still."

When William Bowles arrived at his counting-house, he found Marjoram anxiously awaiting his return.

The policeman knew him to be the friend of Mr. Henry Beacham, the person most interested in preserving the memory of the dead man from reproach, and he determined to work, if possible, upon his friendship.

"You have heard the news, I suppose, sir?" he exclaimed, as soon as the door was closed.

"If you mean Mr. Grindem's death, I have."

"It must have been a bitter disappointment to old Small," resumed the officer with a grin; for, despite his own disappointment, he felt a pleasure in the defeat of the little man; "just, too, as he was on the point of entrapping him into a marriage with his daughter. Do you know if the old man left a will?"

"He has. I am executor."

This was good news, and Marjoram determined to act honestly.

"And who is his heir?" he inquired.

"His nephew."

"Anything to the Smalls?"

"Not a shilling. The affairs of the firm are to be wound up. It will be the ruin of his partner. Much as I despise him, I can feel for his disappointment; for unless we consent—that is the executors—to advance the necessary funds, I repeat, he is a ruined man."

"So much the better," said the officer, still more confirmed in his previous resolution. "Of course, you will not advance a shilling?"

William was silent: he remembered Small's parting words, and, as he could not tell what course he might decide on to preserve the honour of the dead, wisely forebore to pledge himself to any line of conduct.

"Not a penny, sir. I will explain the hold which his partner had over him. By a rascally trick he possessed himself of the papers of the late Simon Gridley, a clerk in the firm, who died in Mr. Crab's

madhouse. They prove Grindem to have been a felon, and, joined with other circumstances, perhaps, something more."

"What mean you?"

"A murderer!" added Marjoram, lowering his voice. "You have doubtless heard of the disinterment of the old clerk's body; there has been foul play, and some one must swing for it. It's true Grindem has escaped, but his memory?"

"Must be preserved at all risks," exclaimed the horror-stricken young man, who well knew the effect which such a disclosure would have upon the sensitive honour of his friend. "If Small has the papers you name, his demands must be complied with."

"But he has not got them," said the officer, with a chuckle.

"Who, then?"

"I have them—here—safe—safe. Had I not been deluded like a fool into a useless journey to see Grindem at his country-house, by his cunning, rascally partner, all might have been well; but the snake is harmless—I have drawn his sting; more—he is in our power, or rather yours."

"In mine?" repeated Bowles.

"Have you forgotten the affair of the notes and letter? Only one proof is wanting to bring home the robbery to young Matthew Small, and that is the letter-book of the firm: as executor you should instantly possess yourself of it—then arrest him."

"At what price do you value those papers?" demanded the young merchant, after a pause, during which he reflected on the propriety of following the speaker's advice.

"I was promised ten thousand pounds for them."

The sum was a large one, but not larger than William well knew his friend would give to preserve his uncle's memory from the fearful disgrace which threatened it; still, the responsibility was too great for him to decide on risking it.

"Listen to me, Marjoram," he said; "you know that I am a partner with my father, and that my acceptance binds the firm: place those papers under seal in my hands till Mr. Beacham arrives from Russia. I will give you a bond that they shall either be restored with the seal unbroken, or the sum you have named be paid to you."

The officer hesitated for a moment—not that he doubted the capability of the speaker to pay, for the firm of Bowles and Son stood amongst the first in Manchester; only he wished to have something in hand—an earnest that the golden harvest he had so cleverly schemed for had not entirely escaped him.

"What say you?"

"One condition more, and I agree to it."

"Name it?"

"A thousand pounds down and the papers are yours, as soon as you sign a bond for the rest. I have been at great trouble as well as expense in the affair. You may

read them if you like," he added, "to convince yourself that I do not overrate their importance."

"No—no," interrupted the young man, with disgust; "I have no wish to become possessed of the dreadful knowledge of the dead man's crimes."

"If produced before the magistrates, their evidence will go far to prove a guilty knowledge of Gridley's death on the part of Grindem; if withheld, the link in the chain of evidence is broken, and Crab must bear the brunt alone."

"But Small has read them."

"Oh, he will be silent for his son's sake; if not I have another hold on him, touching the attempted murder of Tim's Dick; I can prove that he and his sons were on the watch in the neighbourhood—that he was seen in conversation with that ruffian, Flin; besides, you can amuse him till the inquest is over, by holding out hopes of assistance."

It was finally arranged that Marjoram's advice should be followed.

The thousand pounds were paid, and the conditional bond given for the rest; upon which the papers, sealed in their envelope, were placed in the hands of the young man, who carefully deposited them in an iron safe in the counting-house.

"Remember the letter-book," said the officer, as he took his leave; "and hearken, sir: see Mr. Mordaunt—he is the principal mover in the investigation going on at the Infirmary. I know that you have great

influence with him, for you both belong to the *same lodge*: no occasion to commit yourself in any way. As for Matthew Small, leave him to me: just drop me a line at any moment, and I'll have the young rascal in prison within an hour."

"Heaven help me!" sighed poor William, as soon as he was alone; "I am mixed up in some strange transactions. Were it not for Henry's sake, I would wash my hands of the whole affair—legacy, executorship, and all; but while his peace of mind is at stake I'll persevere, and fight the rascal Small with his own weapons. But first let me secure the letter book," he added, "and then to call on *Brother Mordaunt*!"

CHAPTER XV.

Those frown on him, that, fawning, smiled before,
And faces changed with fortune.

THE news of Gilbert Grindem's death spread like wildfire amongst the mercantile community of Manchester; the singular will he left had been mentioned in confidence by the banker to a particular friend, who in turn had whispered it, equally in confidence, to one or two members of the Stock Exchange.

The fate of the wealthy merchant was dwelt upon with little regret, but much curiosity; while all agreed that his upstart partner was a ruined man.

Neither Small nor Grindem had ever found time to make friends, and they met with as little sympathy as they had shown; many even rejoiced at the position in which the latter was placed, for he had been as insolent and overbearing in his prosperity, as he was now abject and mean in adversity.

As he paced along High Street to his office, the little man was painfully convinced of the change which had taken place in his position—men who lately had

bowed to him obsequiously, passed him with a slight, familiar nod.

Brown, the guest whom he had so cruelly mortified at the dinner, gave him the cut direct; and two clerks whom he met, belonging to the house of Openshaw and Sons, absolutely grinned in his face.

"Insolent!" muttered Small, between his clenched teeth.

"*The man with the hysters!*" said one of the young fellows, who caught the word.

The unhappy little man's first impulse was to turn and address them; but he thought better of it, and darted down a narrow lane leading to Cannon Street.

"Why should I give them a second triumph?" he mentally exclaimed. "The first is great enough. I have matter more serious in hand than to waste my time in idle, useless resentment. If this young fool Bowles only yields to my representations, I'll show them the man they have trampled on. The game is not ended yet."

Pulling his hat over his brow, he walked doggedly towards the office, where he found his two sons, Mark and John, as chapfallen as himself; they, too, had had their mortifications,—encountered the cold looks and sneers of those of their own age, who had lately courted their society.

Decidedly the family of the Smalls had sunk below par in public opinion. They, to use a phrase of the

Stock Exchange, were no longer deemed worth quoting in the market.

"The governor seems awfully in the dumps," observed Mark to his brother.

"Ay," growled the young cub, "he has played too fast."

"Any letters?" said the father.

A negative was given, and the father made the best of his way into his late partner's room, where, throwing himself into an easy chair, he began to reflect upon his position and future prospects.

Turn them which way he would, they seemed gloomy enough. His victim had escaped him.

While thus absorbed, a visitor was announced; it was William Bowles.

Small's little keen eyes brightened as he saw the young man enter the room. He thought that the bait he had laid had taken. "Well, sir," he exclaimed, "your decision?"

"We must first have a little serious conversation, Mr. Small," said William. "Before I inform you of my intentions, we must first have some conversation upon another subject. Is Henry Beacham really married?"

"I believe so," was the reply.

"And why have his letters been suppressed? for that they have been I am convinced, both those for me and his uncle."

"His uncle," observed the little man, "was in regular correspondence with him. If you doubt my

word, here is the letter-book, with the date of the late Mr. Grindem's last letter, and the numbers of the notes he forwarded him."

The speaker took the letter-book from the desk, and opening it, pointed out the entry to his visitor.

"Is this Mr. Grindem's hand?" demanded William.

"No; in my son Matthew's.

Bowles closed the book, and, to Small's great surprise, coolly put it in his pocket. The junior partner had not the least suspicion of the robbery which his son had been led to commit.

He thought that he had been bribed to procure the papers by Grindem and Marjoram. The state of his wound had hitherto prevented all questions on the subject.

"What does this mean?" he inquired.

"It means," said the young man, "that your son Matthew, suppressed the letter, and applied the contents to his own use."

Small uttered a groan.

"The letter has been recovered, and one of the notes, the number of which corresponds with the entry, is in my possession. He changed it at the Royal Hotel."

"Fool!" muttered the father; "fool. This explains all. To sell his birthright for a mess of pottage."

What birthright the speaker meant, unless it was his share in the villany of his parent, it would have puzzled a casuist to decide.

"Now, sir," continued his visitor, "I will be plain

with you. As executor to your late partner it would be my duty to prosecute. Your son's fate is in my hands, the papers no longer in yours: one word to stain the honour of the late bad man you called your friend and I cause him to be arrested."

"And what is to become of me?" demanded Small, who, in his selfish nature, cared more for his own welfare than the fate of his son.

"The affairs of the firm, according to the will, must be wound up; but you shall *be treated liberally*—very liberally—if you act as prudence dictates."

"I am in your hands, dispose of me as you will," said the humbled man; "only remember that I have a family. Ah, Mr. Bowles," he added, "if you could only be persuaded to carry on the firm! You are throwing a fortune away from your friend."

"Beacham is already rich enough."

Small mentally acknowledged that such was the case, and resigned himself to the force of circumstances. Bitterly did he regret the thousand pounds he had so uselessly expended in bribing Flin; but his regret came too late.

"Now, then," said his visitor, "we understand each other; act as you have promised, and I will keep faith with you."

With these words they separated: the speaker to visit Mary Heartland, and Small to return home and inform his wife of the change which had taken place in their flourishing prospects.

"Had the old villain but lived another hour," he thought, "I might have defeated them."

And so he could: the fact of having married since the execution of the will, would have given him a right to dispute it, as guardian of the interests of the widow.

"Too late," he added, "too late."

While this interview was going on, a very different scene was taking place at the Infirmary.

Doctor Rand, in presence of the leading magistrates and the principal medical men of Manchester, so clearly demonstrated that the death of the old clerk had been caused by a vegetable poison, named *Aroba pilatica*, a well-known South American plant, that even the most sceptical were convinced.

Crab, accompanied by his solicitor, had been invited to attend.

The little man was pale as death: he felt a most uncomfortable tightness about his throat, which, to his terrified imagination, was already circled by the hangman's cord. His legal adviser looked exceedingly grave.

"Pray," said the learned gentleman, "what peculiar action would the drug, whose presence, on the part of my client, I admit you have demonstrated, produce?"

"A determination of blood towards the head, and consequently apoplexy," was the reply.

"But a less dose?" demanded the lawyer.

"Would act as a powerful stimulant."

"This appears to me, gentlemen," said the man of law, "to be simply a question of judgment, not of crime; but granting, by way of hypothesis, that a crime has been committed, there is nothing to connect my respectable client with the transaction. The medical care of the patients in his establishment was in the hands of Doctor Chinon, a man well known for his professional skill, and whose flight from Manchester—for I can term it nothing else—casts a suspicion upon his conduct. Mr. Crab is well known among us; his life has been one of usefulness and humanity. I think we ought to pause before we suffer an idle surmise to stab a reputation so long and honourably sustained. His system has been, as we can show, approved by the Commissioners of Lunacy"—

"Quoted in the Commons," added Crab.

"Quoted in the Commons," repeated the lawyer; "besides, what interest could he possibly have in lending himself to the poor man's detention or death? I repeat it, if there has been crime, Chinon is the guilty party."

"Mr. Crab," observed Doctor Currey, who was present, "is not ignorant of chemistry. I have myself seen in his study a most expensive and complete laboratory."

"Stock-in-trade, sir," interrupted the madhouse keeper, seriously alarmed at the turn the affair was taking; "I know nothing of the science—I am absolutely ignorant of the simplest manipulations: all the

apparatus you have seen was merely to attract attention."

The doctor smiled, for he never had any real opinion of Crab's attainments.

"You said," observed Mr. Gibson, who conducted the examination on the part of the magistrates, "that Doctor Chinon robbed you?"

"I can prove it," replied Crab; "a thousand pounds which I sent him to get cashed."

"How did you send it—in notes?"

"No—by cheque."

"Were you in the habit of employing him in your banking transactions?"

There was a pause. The question was repeated.

"No," faltered Crabb.

"Did you not write, according to an arrangement between you and the bank, to advise payment of the cheque?"

"No—that is, I—yes—I believe I did."

The hesitation and admission both produced an unfavourable effect, and Mr. Crab was directed to withdraw while the magistrates consulted together.

His solicitor, however, was allowed to remain.

When the keeper of the asylum was re-admitted to the room, the cold, serious regard of the gentlemen present struck a chill to his heart; he felt that the decision was against him.

"I am sorry to inform you," said the presiding magistrate, "that we have come to the painful con-

elusion that it is our duty to commit you to Lancaster gaol on a charge of murder."

"Commit me!" said the terror-stricken wretch. "Good God! can you suppose?—I am known—my system approved—quoted in the Commons, gentlemen—"

"All of which may serve you on your trial."

"Will you take bail?" demanded Crab; "to any amount—any—I am rich, and can find bail in any sum you please?"

"The charge is not aailable one," observed Mr. Gibson; "this is neither the time nor place to enter into further discussion."

"I shall be ruined."

"You should have thought of that before."

Despite his protestations, the wretched man was fully committed, and sent off within the hour to Lancaster, in a chaise, accompanied by two officers.

He wept like a child as the lawyer took leave of him and whispered—

"Save my life, and half my fortune—all—all is at your disposal."

The man of law maintained an ominous silence.

Fortunately, during the examination, the name of Grindem had not been once mentioned; for although both Mordaunt and his friends suspected the merchant as being at the bottom of the fiend-like plot, still they had no legitimate proof, and feared to alarm him before the evidence was complete. They had not heard of his sudden death.

"Well," said Mr. Gibson, as they rode home, "what think you now?"

"That the mystery will be unravelled, and the old clerk avenged at last. Murder is a crime which earth seldom hides: let the assassins plot as darkly as they will, some slender clue is sure to be found to guide the hand of justice."

"True," observed Doctor Rand; "her step, though slow, is sure; her hand is iron, and her blow is death."

When they reached Mordaunt's house, the latter found his young friend and brother, William Bowles, waiting in the library to see him.

Their interview was a long one; but when the young man left, his countenance wore a less clouded aspect than before.

CHAPTER XVI.

It is the curse of wealth to be beset
By interested knaves, to fool
And gull it.

TIMON.

LADY PLAYWELL, together with her husband, Sir William, Adolphus, her daughter, and Amy, were assembled in the richly furnished drawing-room of her splendid mansion, expecting every moment the arrival of the General, who had that very morning landed from India.

All except the orphan were anxious to please the millionaire : she had nothing either to hope or to fear from his wealth, and was a mere spectator of the hopes and speculations of the family.

The Captain had just addressed to her one of those silly, fulsome compliments which men of little wit find successful with women of little understanding. The poor girl had turned silently away.

" 'Pon my word," lisped the puppy, " you are a little insensible creature. The compliment I have just paid you would have turned the heads of half the belles of Versailles and Vienna."

" Address to such, sir, your insulting language,"

replied Amy, mildly. "Englishwomen envy them not, content in rustic manners and in rustic virtue."

"Pamela grows sententious," said the young man, with a sneer.

"Adolphus certainly is a great fool," observed his sister.

Further conversation was broken by the sound of a carriage rattling across the square; and in a few moments the long anxiously looked-for wealthy brother was announced. He was a hale, hearty, bluff-looking man, of about sixty; the climate of the east had bronzed his features, and given them an almost oriental complexion. As he entered the drawing-room in his military undress, Amy could not help observing to herself that he had a fine gentlemanly appearance. Shaking his brother warmly by the hand, he was next introduced to his sister-in-law.

"Glad to see you, Lady Playwell. But how is this, William?" he added, turning to the baronet. "You seem careworn and ill. In a climate like this, you ought to look like an evergreen."

"Family cares,—parliamentary duties," replied his brother, with a smile.

"Ah, I understand—twice married. Heavy dispensations leave their scars."

"My son," said Lady Playwell, not over-pleased with the remark, "Captain Adolphus, so named after his godfather, a royal duke."

"Humph!" muttered the General, eying his shell

jacket—for his nephew was dressed ready to go on parade.

“He is admiring me,” thought the puppy.

“And is that the uniform of your regiment?” demanded his uncle, whose long absence from England made the undress of his nephew appear a novelty.

“Yes. Do you like it? Perfect is it not?”

“Not quite. Something is wanting.”

“Something wanting!” repeated the dandy, with an air of surprise. “What can that be?”

“*A tail.*”

The young officer thought that the speaker alluded to the queue so long worn in the service, and which had been abolished during the general's service abroad.

“And what advantage could I possibly derive,” simpered his nephew, “from a tail?”

“One at least,” thought the General; “it would decide your species;” but he wisely kept his opinion to himself.

Miss Playwell was next introduced. Her uncle kissed her; the poor girl tried hard to look gracious and pleased, but the attempt was a failure.

“And who,” he demanded, pointing to Amy, who was standing at a distance, “is that pale, pretty-looking girl in the corner?”

“Oh, that,” said Lady Playwell, with a feeling of pique caused by the brusque manner of her brother-in-law, “is Miss Amy Lawrence, my daughter's companion.”

"And a very amiable one she seems," observed the old soldier, whom long habit had accustomed to express his opinions without caring whom he pleased or offended.

Amy slightly curtseyed.

Just as the party were about to proceed to lunch, a short, thin man, with a desk under his arm, uncereemoniously entered the room. His face was shrivelled like a leaf in autumn, and the hard lines denoted that he had seen hard service.

"Where am I to put this?" he demanded bluntly.

"Can't tell yet, Rigid," replied his master, mildly.

"When you can let me know"—

"Insolent!" said Adolphus.

"Who is that man?" inquired Lady Playwell.

"That, sister-in-law," said the General, "is the plague of my life—my old servant, Rigid. The fellow never suffers me to have an opinion of my own, and commands the commander."

"You had better let me drill him," observed Adolphus. "I'll soon teach the fellow his duty."

"You had better learn it first yourself, sir," said the man, with a cool stare. "I was drilled before you were born."

The Captain muttered something about a horsewhip.

"Come, come," observed the uncle, who overheard him, "I must have no quarrelling with Rigid. If he has the misfortune to be a bear, he is at least an honest one. He saved my life at Mooltan!"

"Faithful fellow!" exclaimed the lady of the house, who saw at once that her visitor was something of a humorist.

"Humbug!" said Rigid, in an under-tone.

"We must be friends," observed the Captain.

"Must we!" replied the old fellow, with a look of dislike.

"I must shake hands with him," added Miss Playwell, making a violent effort to appear amiable. "Saved my dear uncle?—brave fellow!"

Rigid made a serious kind of grimace as the young lady took his hard hand in hers; for he thought how little either the Captain or his sister would have cared for him, had the life he had saved been that of a poor uncle instead of a rich one.

Sir William proposed, before proceeding to lunch—which fortunately was a cold one—to conduct his brother to his apartment, and left the room, accompanied by the General and his servant.

"What a bear!" observed Adolphus, as soon as the door was closed.

"They are well matched," said his sister.

Her ladyship was silent: she was too prudent to give utterance to her opinion before Amy, against whom she had suddenly conceived a violent and most unaccountable dislike.

"Miss Lawrence," she said, coolly, "as this is a family reunion, perhaps you will prefer having lunch in your own room?"

Poor Amy curtseyed, and withdrew.

"I must get rid of that girl," mentally resolved the lady of the mansion; "these old fools from India have been dried till they are like tinder: a spark sets them in a blaze, and they become capable of any folly. No," she added, "Adolphus, if there is wit in woman, must be the old man's heir."

She was further confirmed in her resolution by the General inquiring at lunch after the young lady, whose pale countenance and quiet manner had attracted his attention; and he seemed dissatisfied when informed that she preferred to lunch in her own room.

"Poor thing!" he said; "it's hard to be a dependent, and treated like one."

His sister-in-law bit her lips, but was silent.

Under plea of fatigue, the General soon afterwards retired to his chamber, where Rigid, who knew his habits, was preparing his hookah.

"Well," said his master, who knew the old man's quick perception of character, "what do you think of my brother?"

"Henpecked," was the reply.

"My sister-in-law?"

"A shrew."

And the speaker, in his master's opinion, was right.

"And my nephew?"

"A puppy."

"Right again," thought the General, who had been disgusted with the conceit of the Captain.

"Well, Rigid," he added, aloud, "you are rather difficult to please. And pray what do you think of my niece, Miss Jane Clara Playwell?"

The hard features of the old soldier were drawn up as if by mistake he had bitten a crab-apple instead of a peach, or mistaken a glass of verjuice for generous champagne.

"Speak out," exclaimed his master, impatiently.

"Sour whey," said the man, bluntly. "The milk of human kindness seems to have been curdled in her from the cradle. She has all the heartlessness of her mother, without the oil which smooths it. Bad set—bad set! Better have stayed in India."

"Well," observed the General, with a sigh, "I must say, that for a portrait painter you are the least given to flattery of any man I ever met. Your likenesses are so truthful that even the originals might shudder at the resemblance."

The old man paused, and sent forth the whiffs of the fragrant weed from his superbly mounted hookah, the gift of the officers of his regiment on his quitting India.

The effect was gradually to soothe him, for something like a smile broke over his once handsome features, as he again addressed his withered, caustic attendant.

"Rigid," he said in a good-humoured tone.

"Well?"

"As you have painted the portraits of my relatives,

you may as well complete the gallery. What do you think of me?"

"Wretchedly suspicious!" replied the little man, with a chuckle, for he had suspected the question would be asked.

"Why, you scoundrel, you"—

"Why did you ask me? You know I can't lie to please even you. I repeat it, you are as suspicious as an old maid who hears her name whispered by her dearest friend. I never said a civil thing to you but once, and you've doubted me ever since."

With these words the speaker turned upon his heel, and left the room without waiting for a reply.

And he was right, for his master was suspicious and jealous of the attachment of all around him.

"Suspicious," repeated the General, laying down the tube of his hookah. "It is the curse of wealth to doubt the motives of those who evince the least kindness, and yet pine for the affection it is doomed to suspect. Oh," he added, bitterly, "how the heart changes. I remember the time I started for India as well as if it were but yesterday. I was a boy, then—open-hearted, confiding. My brother clung to me—wept—begged me not to forget him—made me promise to write by every post. Gradually his letters grew cold and formal; months elapsed, then years, without my receiving one, till by accident he heard I was rich; they became regularly enough then, and now he *seems* all kindness and affection again. I should like

on some means to test the sincerity both of him and his family—to feel assured that it was not my wealth they courted; and—psha!” he added after a moment's pause; “that old fool Rigid was right—I am suspicious!”

Nothing could exceed the attention which for the ensuing month the whole family of the Playwells lavished on their rich relative. If he complained of a draught, Miss Jane Clara was ready with her Cashmere to throw round his neck. Adolphus so far profited by the lessons of his worldly wise mamma as to invite the General to the mess of his regiment. Nay, he even so far compromised himself in the eyes of his fashionable friends as to be seen with him in his cab in Bond Street.

The baronet was the only one of the family who was really glad of his return. He was his companion at breakfast, and at chess. When his parliamentary duties compelled him to be absent, Amy Lawrence generally supplied his place. The General was pleased with her quiet, unobtrusive manners, and gradually became attached to her society. Even that human hedgehog, old Rigid, smiled, when he met her on the stairs, or saw his master occupied at his favourite game beside her; and so the time moved rapidly on.

CHAPTER XVII.

Touch but the chords, and woman's heart is strung,
Like precious pearls hid in a miser's store,
Virtues and self-devotion both are found.

OLD PLAY.

As the day of trial approached, Crab became exceedingly nervous, and held frequent consultations with his lawyer, a man well versed in criminal cases, and generally regarded as the Phillips of Manchester.

The portly person of the madhouse keeper had, from the first hour of his imprisonment, fallen gradually away.

His eyes had become haggard, and he regarded all who approached him with a restless, anxious, inquiring look, as if he sought to read in their countenance the chance which they considered existed of his condemnation or escape.

As he had a command of money, and was liberal to those around him, even to profusion, he was treated by the keepers with a certain degree of respect.

His table was daily supplied from the nearest hotel, and every comfort which the prison regulations permitted, and perhaps something more, was freely allowed.

Barnes, his confidential keeper, had frequent and long consultations with him.

The wretched man was seated at a table in his narrow cell, looking over a mass of papers which his lawyer had brought. The serious air of the man of law had something more than usually ominous in it, and struck a chill to the culprit's heart.

It wanted only three days to the assizes.

A half-emptied decanter of wine stood on the table between them: neither seemed to have an inclination to finish it. To Crab even wine had lost its zest.

"And you think this line of defence," he said, after a pause, "is safest, Mr. Shearwit?"

"It is the only one," replied his adviser. "You can rely upon Barnes, you say?"

"True as steel—he will swear to anything I wish."

"Hem!" said the lawyer. "Anything that is true, you mean?"

"Of course," replied the prisoner. "And now, my dear sir" (this was uttered in a most affectionate tone), "tell me candidly—I am not a man to start at evil intelligence, like a child at a shadow—what do you *really think* are my chances of an acquittal?"

Mr. Shearwit hesitated: not that he felt any doubt as to the result that he had long foreseen; but he was embarrassed how to convey his opinion to the prisoner.

"All depends upon your witnesses," he replied, after a pause of some moments, which seemed like an age to Crab, "and how they stand the cross-examination of

Sergeant Arlan, who unfortunately has been retained against us: somehow or another, he has a way of sifting evidence. Hang the fellow! give him the finest clue, and he will follow it through all the ins and outs till he arrives at the end of it—then he is so eloquent! He was an actor once, and is up to stage tricks, knows the clap-traps to win a jury. Still there is hope. I wish he had been on our side,” he added thoughtfully; “sincerely wish it.”

The culprit turned very pale. The slow, sententious manner in which the opinion was given seemed to the unhappy man like the tolling of a death bell, and he already began to feel certain choking sensations about his throat.

“Come, cheer up,” said the lawyer; “you have three days yet to prepare, and”—

“Three days!” interrupted Crab: “ay, three days of agony and suspense—to sit and watch the fleeting hours—count every minute as it flies, and feel more heartsick. Is there no way of escape? I am rich—can pay liberally—let them take all. I care not if I land in America a beggar—a beggar,” he added, despairingly, “so I save my life.”

Shearwit shook his head. He knew that the governor of the gaol was incorruptible, and that the keepers, without his connivance, were powerless to assist in such a scheme, even supposing that it were possible to bribe them.

“I see—I see!” exclaimed the unhappy man,

clasping his hands wildly, and crying like a child; "I am doomed—I shall be murdered—legally murdered! By heavens! I had no share in the old man's death! It was that villain Chinon, who robbed me."

"That would have been an excellent defence, but for the unfortunate letter of advice to the bank, to pay him the thousand pounds."

Crab groaned deeply, and bitterly cursed himself that he had ever learned to write.

"Don't you think," said the lawyer, after a pause, "that your mind would be easier if your affairs were settled?"

"How settled?" demanded Crab.

"I speak merely," continued Shearwit, "in case of accident. You are rich, Mr. Crab—very rich; and should a conviction unfortunately take place—although even then I should not utterly despair, so strong is the public feeling against capital punishment—every shilling you possess would be forfeited to the Crown. Now you must have some one whom you love?"

Crab groaned: he loved nothing but his money; he had made a God of that, worshipped it in the corrupted temple of his heart, and found the idol impotent to save him.

"Some friend," said the lawyer, blandly, "whose zeal you would wish to recompense. In such a case, nothing is more easy than to rescue your money from the grasp of a rapacious government. A deed of gift before conviction"—

"Not a penny!" exclaimed the wretch, in a violent fit of excitement; "not a penny: I'll take it with me—it shall be buried with me—rot with me! Do you think that I have toiled, and scraped, and sinned to let others enjoy the fruits of my industry, and laugh at me in the grave? no, no!"

"As you please," observed Mr. Shearwit, coolly; "I merely threw out the suggestion."

Shortly after the man at law gathered up his papers and withdrew, leaving his client in a state of mind to which madness would have been relief, and death mercy.

No sooner was he alone than Crab hastily untied his neckerchief, and taking out the pad ripped it carefully open.

Amongst the wires which formed the supports, he withdrew a small paper: it contained an impalpable white powder—the quantity would scarcely have covered a shilling, and yet there was enough to send a dozen strong men to the grave; in fact, it was a virulent poison, so sudden in its effects, that it destroyed the principle of life without any of those lingering pangs which generally accompany death produced by similar means.

"At least," he muttered, "I am armed against the scaffold. They shall not drag me like a dog to the accursed tree; the hangman's hand shall not pollute my neck. Fool!" he added bitterly, "fool! was I not rich enough? had I not the means of procuring every

enjoyment? To fall by the thirst for that of which I had more than enough. Of what use is my money now? will it buy my safety? No. Prolong my existence one brief hour? No. Even the devil gold is powerless in a case like mine."

There was a gentle knock at the door of the cell.

Crab hastily hid the packet in his pocket, and trying to assume a calm air, called out to the party to come in.

Barnes made his appearance; he was dressed in his best; he thought it only a mark of respect to his master. The fellow had screwed up his face to assume a look of sympathy; but it would not do—he only caricatured the feeling.

"Well, Barnes," said his master, "what news?"

"Bad, sir," said the fellow, shaking his head; "very bad; eleven more patients removed by their friends. The asylum, which used to be as lively and pleasant as a skittle-ground, is grown so lonesome-like, that I scarcely care about staying in it."

"Hang the patients—I can live without them."

"Can you?" said the man, with a look of surprise; "well, that's a comfort for you, anyhow; but it only wants three days to the *'sizes*."

Crab's countenance fell: indirectly the speaker conveyed his opinion that his case was a desperate one.

"But I shall be back in Manchester soon," observed his master, trying to assume a confidence which he was very far from feeling.

"Yes—I—suppose so," slowly drawled the keeper,

at the same time brushing his hat with the cuff of his coat—not that it was dusty, but he wanted something to do.

“You will come and see me, on my return?”

Barnes shuddered; but hastily recovering himself, promised that he would.

His master read his thoughts: it flashed upon him in an instant that the bodies of criminals were generally sent to the Infirmary of Manchester for dissection, and the involuntary shudder of his servant was explained.

“Oh!” he exclaimed, clasping his hands together, “is there no hope? Barnes,” he added, “I have been a liberal master to you—I will be more so. Your evidence, if you swear firmly, can save me. You know I never went near the cell of the old fool Gridley; stick to that, and they can’t hang me—I’m sure they can’t.”

“White, the new keeper, has sworn you did. Bad job,” said the man; “bad job. Old Grindem was lucky—popped off just in the nick of time.”

“Curse him!” groaned the prisoner; “curse him! it was an evil day I ever saw him.”

“So I’m thinking.”

“Or listened to him.”

Barnes nodded as much as to say, “You are right.”

His wretched master grasped him by the arm, and earnestly entreated of him to contrive some means for his escape.

In his desperation he proffered him half his fortune, to change clothes with him.

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 demeanour for one of dogged menace, eyed
 oyer for several seconds in silence.
 villain, am I?" at last he muttered; "well, per-
 1. But I know who made me one, and so

shall the jury. Who paid me to force the old man to swallow your infernal drugs? Who betted with Chinon a thousand pounds that he would live over a certain day? Ah! you may well change colour. You did not think that I overheard that; but you are mistaken—others can listen as well as yourself.”

“Barnes!”

“Your visits, too, to old Grindem. Perhaps, if they examine your account at the bank, they will find how soon after Gridley’s death you paid in a large sum of money; for, rascal as you are, a small one would not have tempted you to place your neck within the compass of a halter.”

“Barnes,” exclaimed his master, more and more alarmed, “I was hasty. You know my temper—what is your desire? Of course, I always intended to provide for you and Bet.”

“I know that you ought to do so.”

“How much do you require? Speak out.”

“Oh,” said the fellow, dropping at once into a respectful tone, “we ain’t greedy. Three or four hundred a year will make us comfortable for life.”

“You shall have it,” replied Crab; “that is if I escape.”

“*I must have it afore*, or I speak out. No, no—we know each other too well to trust to promises. Why, you would break an oath as easily as I would my word, for the mere pleasure of doing it, to say nothing of the gain.”

"I'll sign anything you please," exclaimed the agitated man: "settle anything you please, provided I escape."

"Something afore," repeated the man, with an impatient toss of his head.

"Not unless I escape," repeated Crab, firmly.

"You can't escape," replied the keeper. "There's little Lizzy—she saw and heard too much. They have got her up at the house of Squire Mordaunt. Not even her own mother is allowed to see her, except in the presence of the housekeeper."

"That's unfortunate," said Crab.

"Very," repeated the man, ferociously. "I wish I could see her, I'd soon silence her babbling, I warrant me."

"Try," muttered his master, in a low tone, "and if you succeed, I'll give you a thousand pounds—two," he added, eagerly; "make you rich for life."

"It's no use," replied Barnes, in a tone of vexation; for he felt grieved to see so much money absolutely going a begging. "I have tried to see her—climbed the garden wall—but there was always some one with her. She is too well taken care of."

The fellow was right: Mordaunt not only was aware of the importance of the child's evidence, but felt interested in her on account of her intelligence, and the natural feeling she had displayed when speaking of her old friend's death.

• He knew that every effort would be made to keep

her out of the way on the day of trial, and she was watched with a vigilance which was as kind as it was prudent.

"So you see," said Barnes, "it's all up, and you may as well do the handsome thing by Bet and me while it's in your power."

"I'll think of it."

"You haven't much time to spare," was the coarse rejoinder. "In two days the judges will arrive."

"Come to me to-morrow early," hastily interrupted Crab, with forced calmness, "and you shall have my answer."

"Come," said Barnes, with a half-coaxing air, "do it at once; I know you've got plenty of money about you. Better let an old friend have it than Calcraft."

"To-morrow," groaned Crab, turning very pale; "to-morrow."

The keeper, disappointed in the effect of his eloquent persuasions, reluctantly took his leave, promising to call at an early hour the following day.

No sooner was he alone, than the prisoner began to pace up and down his cell.

Evidently he was meditating some important act—"screwing his courage to the sticking place"—for the drops of cold perspiration fell from his brow. At times he would clasp his hands, or toss them wildly in despair.

He was in this state of frightful agitation and excitement when the keeper entered to lock up the cell for the night.

The man glanced at him curiously, for in his eyes he was already doomed: and a condemned felon is always an object of interest with his gaoler, especially if he has hitherto moved in a respectable sphere of life—it varies the monotony of the prison.

“Time to lock up, sir,” he observed.

“So soon?”

“Past eight. Is there anything I can do for you?”

“No; yet stay,” said the prisoner, after a moment’s reflection; “I expect my lawyer early in the morning, and I have not yet completed my instructions for the defence. He gives me best hopes,” added the speaker, with a forced smile; “I am sure to be acquitted.”

“Glad to hear it,” replied the man, trying to look as if he believed him.

“Could you not let me have a light for an hour or so?” demanded Crab.

“Against the rules, sir.”

“I am willing to pay for the accommodation—two—three—come, five sovereigns.”

Crab took out his purse as he spoke, and counted out the glittering coin upon the table.

Had the gaoler not seen the bribe, in all probability he would have resisted it; but he was poor, and had a wife and children depending on his slender salary for support.

“Well, sir—of course a gentleman in your situation
’ways anxious to oblige; so, if you’ll promise
ut the light the instant you hear the prison

clock strike ten, I'll leave you my lantern. The governor goes his rounds then, and should he see a light in one of the cells, I should lose my place. It is not worth much, but it is all I have to depend upon."

The prisoner faithfully promised.

The man picked up the five sovereigns from the table, and leaving his lantern, left the cell, carefully locking the iron door after him.

As soon as the receding footsteps of the man assured him that there was no danger of interruption, Crab took out his pocket-book, and, placing it upon the table, began counting the notes. They amounted to the enormous sum of twenty thousand pounds—the fruit of his long life of villany and crime.

Directly after his committal, he had drawn them from the bank, in the vain hope of employing them to insure his safety.

"And so," said the unhappy felon, "this is the result of all my toil. I remember when I first started into life, I fixed upon this sum as the extent of my ambition. Not a guinea of it, but is stained by crime—by human suffering—hopeless tears. It is mine—the sum I have sighed for is won; but oh, at what a price! the devil has placed wealth within my grasp at the very moment when I must relinquish it. What enjoyments would it not purchase?—ease, luxury, respect—for the world still bows to Mammon, and I must lose it. It would buy beauty, wine, lands, a—"

green trees, but not liberty," he added, bitterly, "not liberty! There is no bribing the hangman's hand—no corrupting the judge; I must die—die like a felon, before the curious gaze of unpitying thousands, who will flock to my execution as to a holiday; boys will look forward to it as to a spectacle; old men date events from the murderer's execution! Wealth—cursed wealth! The desire of acquiring these has perilled my soul and body. I am lost—here and hereafter lost."

"But none," he exclaimed, "shall enjoy the prize for which I sinned—squander in pleasure the fruits of my toil and crime. If I cannot take it with me, I will at least disappoint the greedy wolves who are impatient to divide the spoil. How the fiend must laugh," he added, "to see the bait which tempted me turning to ashes in my grasp."

With these words, he deliberately held the notes to the flame of the lantern, and resolutely kept them there till they were consumed to the last vestige, which with a breath he dispersed over the floor of his cell.

"Ashes," he muttered; "ashes, as I soon shall be."

After the destruction of his riches, it is astonishing how quickly Crab became reconciled to the idea of death.

While the notes remained unconsumed, with all his resolution he would have found it impossible to complete the last dreadful act he contemplated; but these once destroyed, he viewed his approaching fate, if not

with complacency, at least without regret; for him it might truly be said life had lost its savour.

Taking the packet which contained the poison from his bosom, he carefully mixed it in a glass of wine, and, placing it before him, contemplated the fearful draught in silence.

In the pauses which preceded the taking of it, every action of his life passed as vividly and distinctly before him as if a panorama had been unfolded to his gaze.

He saw himself a boy at school, overreaching his playmates at their games—grasping at gain—pilfering from their trunks and desks; then a youth, first starting into life—watching each chance—cringing and scheming by turns, till the first stone of his fortune was laid; next a man, gazing with unholy love upon a pale, fair-haired girl, whose heart he broke, whose affection he bartered, for the hand of age; but then that hand was set in gold.

He shuddered as the recollection crossed him, and words long since forgotten smote upon his ear.

“Avenged, Ellen!” he groaned; “thy wrongs are fearfully avenged at last. Had I but listened to thy voice, I might have been a happy husband—a proud father; now no child will pray over the suicide’s dishonoured grave—no tear of affection or regret will hallow it. I’ll think no more—the future cannot be more terrible than the present; if there is a heaven, I have forfeited it—if a place of punishment, no mercy can redeem me.”

With frantic haste he caught up the glass, and tossed off the contents.

The effect was instantaneous, with a deep groan, he fell upon the ground; his chest heaved—for a few moments convulsively; then there was a stiffening of the limbs, and a film passed over his strained eye-balls—a pause—a second struggle, fainter than the first—and all was over.

A soul stood before the judgment-seat—an inanimate clod alone remained on earth. Crab had escaped human judgment, but not the justice of heaven.

Barnes and the lawyer were both equally disappointed, when, calling at the gaol the following morning, they were informed that the prisoner had destroyed himself.

The rage of the former vented itself in curses; for he had fully expected to have extorted a considerable sum from the fears of his old master.

“He always was a sneaking villain,” he observed to one of the gaolers; “and Satan has only got his due at last.”

The lawyer went a more subtle way to work.

Knowing that the unhappy man had a large sum in notes in his possession, he requested of the governor that the pocket-book and papers of the deceased might be given into his possession—a demand which was very properly refused.

They were produced, however, on the inquest, but were found to contain nothing of importance

—not a note, bill, or security for money could be found.

A verdict of “self-murder” was returned, and the body of the madhouse-keeper was interred in that part of the churchyard set apart for criminals and suicides.

News of the death of Mr. Crab reached Manchester just as Mordaunt and his learned friend was about to start for Lancaster. The intelligence both surprised and shocked them.

“It is nothing more than I expected,” observed the former; “he was sure that the trial would go against him: he has but anticipated the judgment of his fellow-men. Poor old Gridley,” he added; “he is avenged at last.”

“Why, yes,” said the Doctor, taking a pinch of snuff, “Grindem and Crab are both gone. So, to use a mercantile phrase, that account is balanced.”

“My dear old friend,” said the merchant, “you forget your promise.”

“Do I?” said the man of learning, trying at the same very hard to recollect what promise he had ever given.

“Not to allude to the name of Grindem in connection with this sad affair.”

“Of course not,” said Rand, at the same time tapping the top of his head—a constant habit with him whenever he wished to recollect anything; “of course not. But why are you so anxious for the old merchant’s reputation?”

"Not for the sake of the dead, but of the living—to spare the honour of a noble-minded fellow, who at present is absent from England, and who, I am certain, would exile himself for ever, should he ever suspect the crime of which his uncle was doubtless the instigator, and Crab the instrument."

"Ah, I understand," exclaimed the doctor, with a smile; "Freemasonry again! Well, there certainly must be something singular in this bond of brotherhood which links men of such opposite character together. By-the-bye, Mordaunt, can you give me any information respecting the real founders of the order; for I trace it far beyond the era assigned by popular authorities—the builders of the Temple."

"Become a member of our order," replied his friend; "pass the mystic veil—and then you will be satisfied."

"No, no," replied the old man, with a smile. "I can't afford the time. I shall return to town. In six months the notes to my work on Monoliths will be ready; after that, perhaps, we shall see; but I can't neglect my Monoliths."

And so the two friends parted—the bookworm to his studies, the mason to the active duties of life.

A great weight was removed from the mind of William Bowles when he heard of the suicide of Mr. Crab: he dreaded the trial, as likely to connect the name of Gilbert Grindem with the murder of the poor old clerk; and the effect of such a disgrace upon the sensitive mind of his friend he shuddered to contemplate.

Arrangements had been made for the celebration of his marriage with Mary Heartland. Her maiden aunt had been fairly worried out of her consent by William's staunch friends, Doctor Currey and Mr. Majorbanks, the latter of whom, as one of the orphan's guardians, had a voice in the disposal of her hand.

The settlements had been duly drawn up, and another week was to see her the wife of William Bowles.

To the devoted, generous-hearted young merchant, life appeared all sunshine. Yet a few days, and the object of his love would be his—united by that tie which death alone can sever.

The sensation of happiness, perhaps, would have been too overpowering, had it not been tempered by the continued anxiety he felt on Henry Beacham's account; for William Bowles had a heart as open to friendship as to love.

He had written letter after letter, informing him of his uncle's death, of the reports of his marriage; but had never once been favoured with a reply.

"He must be dead," he would sometimes despondingly exclaim. "Henry would never treat me so; or some infernal treachery has been at work."

The young man was right: Small had not yet played the last of his dirty cards.

William and his father were one morning busily occupied in the counting-house, when the former was informed that a sailor boy wished to see him.

The lad was instantly admitted: he was a fine looking lad of about sixteen, and made as many bows as a country squire on entering the drawing-room of a fashionable lady.

"Well, my lad," demanded William, "what do you want with me?"

"Are you Mr. William Bowles, *Esquire*?" said the youth.

"The same," replied the young man, with a smile.

"And are you acquainted with Mr. Henry Beacham, *Esquire*?"

The merchant bounded from his seat as if he had received an electric shock: he felt that at last he should hear some intelligence of his friend.

"I am his friend," he exclaimed. "For heaven's sake, my good boy, if you have any letter—any intelligence to communicate, let me have it instantly: I am most anxious to hear from him. I will reward you," he added, "beyond your expectations."

"I don't require any recompense," replied the sailor, bluntly. "The gentleman was kind to me in St. Petersburg—had the captain up before the consul for beating me. I would go through fire and water to serve him."

"You have a letter?" eagerly demanded William, who recognised his friend in the sympathy he had shown for the oppressed.

"I have a letter."

The youth began to fumble in the lining of his cap, in which he had secreted the letter.

To Bowles's impatience it seemed an age before he produced it.

To snatch it from his hand, break open the seal, and devour its contents, were the act of an instant.

He *saw* the purport of the letter—he did not want to read it.

“Thank God!” he exclaimed; “he lives and is well. Father, give this lad five sovereigns. Call again, my lad, any time before you leave Manchester. Be sure you do not quit the place without seeing me.”

“I won't, sir,” said the boy, with a second series of bows.

William caught up his hat and rushed from the counting-house, whilst his bewildered parent paid over to the messenger the sum his son had named.

“God bless the boy!” exclaimed the old man, who in his heart was as pleased as his son at hearing from Henry Beacham; “I wish he were married and settled; for what with this love and friendship, I am obliged to look after the affairs of the firm myself. I wonder,” he added, with an eye to business, “if there is any intelligence respecting the markets in Russia.”

Although it was an early hour in the morning—indeed, far too early for a visit—William directed his steps to the mansion of Miss Heartland.

Had the old maid been visible, she would have been exceedingly shocked at the impropriety, as she would

have termed it, of a call at such an unseasonable hour.

Fortunately she still kept her dressing-room; for at her age the toilette has many mysteries which youth little dreams of; and so a lecture was spared to both the lovers.

"The young ladies are in the drawing-room," said the servant, in answer to the young man's inquiries. "Perhaps I had better inform Miss Mary that you wish to see her?"

Without a word, the impatient lover pushed the man aside, and bounded up the stairs to the drawing-room.

Mary, and two of her young friends who had been invited to act as bridesmaids on the coming occasion, were busily occupied in inspecting a variety of silks, laces, and the many et ceteras of a bridal outfit, which our female readers are far more capable of describing than we are.

A grave difference of opinion had arisen between the girls on the respective merits of a pale gray watered silk and a love of an apple-blossom coloured satin—the intended bride was undecided—when the door opened, and her lover, his countenance flushed with excitement, entered the room.

There was a faint exclamation of surprise from all the three young creatures; but having assured themselves, by a glance in the mirror, that even in their morning dress they were not so very hideous, they gradually resigned themselves to the visit.

Mary alone blushed deeply ; for the silks and satins upon the table hinted at preparations for an event which, however anxiously desired, makes the heart of a maiden beat even when alluded to.

"Oh, Mr. Bowles !" exclaimed the eldest of the bridesmaids, who, having twice officiated in a similar capacity, considered herself an authority upon the proper etiquette ; "this is unfair ; I declare you have caught me in my wrapper."

"Has anything occurred, William ?" demanded Mary Heartland, fixing her eyes with an anxious expression upon her lover.

"No—nothing—that is, nothing that need alarm you, Mary ; pray forgive my unceremonious visit. Did you know how charmingly you all look," he added, "in your *deshabille*, and how that pretty air of confusion becomes you, you would pardon my abruptness."

"I am not so sure of that," replied his intended, with a faint smile ; for she saw that something must have occurred to have brought him to her house at such an unusual hour.

As an old bachelor, it is not to be supposed that the author can explain the species of freemasonry by which girls communicate their wishes to one another ; indeed, I question if few married men ever pierced that mystery.

Certain it was to William's great relief that, under pretence of removing the litter—as they termed the

tumbled-up heap of silks and laces—the two young ladies left the drawing-room, and Mary and William remained alone.

“Something, I am certain, has occurred,” said the former; “tell me, William—if I cannot give advice, I can at least offer consolation. I have almost a right to ask,” she added, casting her eyes upon the ground; “for it is long since I had a secret from you.”

“My sweet girl!” said her lover, “I have received a letter at last from Henry Beacham, and I know not whether it has most delighted or pained me. It seems, for some crooked reason or another, the agent of the firm has taken advantage of my friend’s being a partner in the house to call upon him for security for certain claims, which are merely trumped-up for the occasion. His uncle, I know, only sent him to Russia in the hope of breaking off his attachment to poor Amy Lawrence; and he was not a man to scruple at any means of keeping him there.”

“But why does he not leave?” demanded Mary, anxiously.

“He cannot—the laws of Russia do not permit a foreigner to quit the place till every claim against him is either satisfied or security given. From the style in which he writes, it is evident that all my letters to him and his to me have been intercepted—that some infernal treachery has been at work. Mary,” he added, “he was the friend of my youth; we loved each other like

brothers. I am sure you can feel and sympathise with me, with him, and poor Amy."

"You are his uncle's executor," observed Mary; "and he is rich now. Send him money—no matter to what amount."

"Money alone," replied William, "will not procure his liberty—he is too deeply ensnared. He requires a friend—a firm and faithful friend."

"I see," exclaimed the poor girl, bursting into tears; "you wish to delay our marriage—to break it off! Oh, William, William, Henry Beacham is dearer to your heart than your affianced wife! You would sacrifice me for him!"

"By heavens, you wrong me! No, Mary—no; the hope of calling you mine is now the magnet of my existence; that hope broken, and life would indeed be worthless. The sacrifice you hint at is more than even a friendship like Henry's could demand—more than I have a right to ask of you. I came to you for consolation, not to wound you by a request at which my heart would feel as deeply as yours. And yet he saved my life."

"Your life, William?"

"Yes—we were boys at school together; one day, while bathing, I was seized with a sudden cramp; the stream was both deep and dangerous. My school-fellows stood aghast—not one ventured to my assistance, save Henry. Twice he plunged into the water; I was already senseless; the third time he succeeded in dragging me to the bank, and sank exhausted by my

side. Do you wonder that I love him? It is a debt of gratitude."

"And must be paid," exclaimed Mary, bursting into tears, "no matter at what price, William," she added; "you say you did not come to postpone the celebration of our marriage?"

"The thought," exclaimed the young man, "never once struck me. I have no right, Mary, to trifle with your feelings—to exact a sacrifice at which my own revolt. No, Mary—no; the love I bear you is as sincere as the object of it is worthy and confiding."

"Go, William," exclaimed the excited girl, agitated by the extent of the sacrifice; "go to your friend—he is worthy of you—worthy of the trial. I feel that even the love of a wife could not console you for such a loss as his. Go, that you may not have a reproach upon your heart at the altar, a duty neglected, a debt of affection unpaid. Go, and God prosper both you and Henry."

"My own true, generous girl," exclaimed the young man, clasping her with passionate love to his manly breast; "this sacrifice is more than friendship could expect. I may be absent, but my heart will linger with you—my every thought be yours. Henceforth it is not love—it is idolatry—the soul's true worship. Well shall a life of devotion to your happiness repay this noble act."

The effort had been almost too much for the poor girl, and yet she did not regret that she had made it.

The first impulse of a generous heart is generally that of right. She felt that her firmness was forsaking her, and wisely resolved to spare her lover and herself a second pang, which might have destroyed her resolution and upset his manliness ; for, though firm, where he himself alone was concerned, William had a heart as tender as a child for the sufferings of those he loved.

“ Now leave me,” she whispered, faintly ; “ the first struggle is the worst. I do not say think of me, for I feel confident of your love. I shall pray and watch for your return ; and if, in some hour of solitude, my heart repines, I’ll think of the two boys—one risking his life to save the other—and the sense of duty shall sustain me.”

It would be too painful to linger over the parting scene of the young lovers, each making so great a sacrifice to the claims of friendship.

What promises were given—what vows were made—our readers can well imagine.

With a torn heart, William broke away from the devoted girl, and rushed, more like a madman than a reasonable being, towards the counting-house, to inform his father of his intended voyage.

Nothing could exceed Miss Heartland’s and Mr. Majorbanks’ surprise when informed by Mary of the postponement of her marriage.

The young bridesmaids felt almost indignant, till their friend explained to them the cause, when, true to

the instincts of youth and nature, they warmly applauded the generous sacrifice she had made.

Not so her aunt. She had never liked the marriage, and her evil spirit rejoiced in the chance which she perceived of its being broken off.

But this time the venom of her words was harmless. *Mary knew her* by the bitter experience of the past.

"And you believe in this fine romantic tale of friendship and Russia?" demanded the old lady, with an air of ironical pity.

"Firmly," replied Mary.

"Poor child—poor child! Well, thank heaven, I never listened to the follies of what the world calls love; but it strikes me that if, upon the eve of my wedding-day, my intended had proposed such a thing to me"—

"William did not propose it," quietly observed her niece.

"But he hinted at it—it's all the same."

"He did not even wish it," added the confiding girl. "The proposal was mine—the request was mine; and, whatever may be the result, I shall never regret having made it."

Her old friends, Majorbanks and Doctor Currey, warmly applauded her conduct.

"You have established a claim upon your future husband's affection," said the latter, "which time cannot break. Passion will often fade with beauty, but the love which a great and noble act inspires dies only

with the heart in which the recollection of it is enthroned."

Mary smiled: it was something to have won the approbation of a man like Doctor Currey; but still, in secret, the poor girl wept long and bitterly.

The danger of the voyage was ever present to her imagination, and many a prayer was daily offered up for the return of the absent William.

When William Bowles arrived at the counting-house, he found his father seated, looking over the correspondence of the firm. The hurried step and flushed countenance of his son did not escape the old man's attention.

Laying down his spectacles and letters, he demanded—in the tone of a friend, not a father—what had occurred.

"Read that," replied the young man, at the same time handing him Henry Beacham's letter.

The father read it over twice.

"What think you of that?"

"That it is about as complete a piece of rascality as ever was perpetrated. Poor lad—poor lad! And so he is not married, after all?"

"No—there is not a word from which I can draw such an inference. It was all a plot of his uncle and that rascally partner of his."

"And what do you propose to do?" inquired the old gentlemen, anxiously; for he knew the true friendship existing between the young men.

"Start directly for St. Petersburg."

"William," said his father, gravely, "under any other circumstances, if I did not approve, perhaps I should not say that such a step was wrong; but you are about to be married—a few days more will make you a husband. What would the world say?"

"Curse the world? It cannot give me another friend."

"What will your intended wife say?"

"Father," exclaimed the young man, deeply moved by the scene which had just taken place between him and Mary; "she herself proposed that I should go. Think you, strong as is my attachment for Henry, I would have wounded her heart by a slight at such a moment, when she had given me the truest proof that woman can give of devotion, in consenting to be mine. I trust I have too much manhood for that."

"And Mary wishes you to go?" repeated Mr. Bowles, hastily putting on his spectacles to hide a tear which admiration drew into his eyes.

"More, father—she has already bade me farewell. The packet, I find, sails from Liverpool to-morrow. Your consent and blessing will not be wanting, I am sure; for you never yet shrank at any sacrifice at the call of duty."

"And will not now, boy," replied his father, in a voice broken by emotion. "Go, and God speed you in your enterprise! If the young heart which loves you, on the eve of being united to you, can bid you

forth, the weak old one of a father shall not detain you. But, oh! William, be careful of your safety. I know the claim of friendship—how strong its ties; but you are my only son. Should anything occur to deprive me of you, think of your mother's broken heart—of your old father's desolation. There," continued the speaker, seeing that his son was too much agitated to reply to him—"not a word; I know your feelings; I can read them. Make your preparations as quickly as possible, and don't spare the firm, William—draw for what sums you require. I'll not grudge the money, when it is to serve the man who preserved to me a son."

William grasped his father's hand, and pressed it hastily to his lips.

He knew the struggle it must have cost him to make up his mind to the separation, and it caused an additional pang to his own affectionate heart.

It was settled that his father should break the intelligence to Mrs. Bowles—the old man wisely determining to spare both her and him the pain of parting.

The next day, furnished with unlimited credit upon the first banking houses in St. Petersburg, the fine-hearted fellow set sail from Liverpool; as the vessel left the Mersey, he dashed a tear aside, and nerved every energy of his mind to the accomplishment of the object of his voyage.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Friends are like shadows, seen only in the sunshine.

COURT OF OLD FRITZ.

THE morning was a gloomy one, and the party in St. James's Square were assembled at a late hour in the breakfast-room of Sir William Charles Playwell's mansion.

Her ladyship was doing the honours of the table, while her husband perused the morning papers, in which occupation he was assisted by the unobtrusive attention of Amy Lawrence, who cut the journals, and laid them one after the other upon a side-table, ready to his hand.

The old General was seated in an easy chair—the climate of England did not agree with his Indian constitution.

He had been dragged the preceding night, much against his will, to a ball at Almack's, of which fashionable place of resort his sister-in-law was one of the patronesses; and, to use his nephew's own expression, he was as surly as a bear.

Adolphus was amusing himself by feeding a French

poodle from his plate, while Jane Clara, his unamiable sister, was vainly attempting to make herself agreeable to the uncle.

“Whew! what a draught!” peevishly observed the old man.

In an instant his niece ran and fetched her cashmere from the sofa, and threw it round the General's neck.

“There,” she said “it's my best cashmere; I wouldn't lend it to any human being except yourself—that will keep you warm.”

“Thank you,” growled the uncle.

Lady Playwell smiled: with her knowledge of the world, she saw that a daughter's attentions would only be valued by the equally worldly-minded General at their true worth.

“How provoking!” muttered the baronet, annoyed at some paragraph he had been reading in the paper.

“What's the matter?” demanded his brother.

“Nothing—only I spoke last night. You know I am not a vain man, but I may say, without flattery, that I certainly did produce some effect.”

Here his dutiful son yawned, by way of illustrating the effect his father's discourse must have produced.

Her ladyship, who understood him, quietly smiled.

“The Minister,” continued the baronet, “was all attention, the Opposition for once silent, and yet the *Times*—merely states: ‘Sir William Charles Playwell followed, on the same side of the question.’”

Meeting with no reply or sympathy, the speaker continued to read his journal.

"Do you know who is to be at Miss Million's ball?" demanded the Captain of his mother, as he assisted her to a wing of curried pheasant poul.

"The old set, I suppose."

"And who is Miss Million?" inquired the General, struck by the name.

"The richest heiress in London," replied the lady; "a *parvenu*, but set in a gilt frame; she dotes upon Adolphus."

"Does she?"

"But the silly boy," continued his mamma, "is so disinterested."

The uncle opened his eyes, as much as to intimate that he should never have suspected such a thing.

"Yes," continued his vain mother, "and although the poor girl gives him every encouragement, I can't induce him to propose. Your brother, as you are aware, General, is not rich, besides, there is a claim to a peerage in the family, which, with the influence such a fortune would give, it would not be difficult to revive."

"Ah—true," observed the General; "the Earldom of Bury. I recollect the Minister offered it to me after the affair of Mocltan, but I declined it."

"You did?" exclaimed the lady, with surprise.

"Of course I did. What the deuce did I want with a peerage? I have no children."

"But you have a nephew, General," observed the lady, bitterly.

A low, inarticulate "Humph!" was the rejoinder, and the conversation suddenly dropped; nor was it resumed till a second paragraph caught the baronet's attention.

"Dear me! sad news from India."

"From the Punjaub?" eagerly inquired his brother.

"No—from Bombay. The house of Alexander, Hyams, and Company, has failed for more than two millions of money. Sad thing for our merchants at home."

An idea suddenly struck General Playwell, who, in his way, was as great a schemer as his sister-in-law.

He had long wished to prove the sincerity of the attentions by which he was hourly overwhelmed, and the present seemed a fit occasion.

Clasping his hands together, as if he had received a dreadful shock, he exclaimed—

"Failed!—ruin—beggary!"

"Uncle!"

"Brother!"

Her ladyship and Adolphus were silent.

"Yes," continued the old soldier, "ruined. All my fortune was placed in their hands. I don't think that I have a thousand pounds' credit in Europe, after a life of toil like mine, when I thought of making those who love me happy. Dreadful—cruel reverse!"

"Frightful," said Jane Clara, at the same time

quietly withdrawing her cashmere from the back of his easy chair. "What will you do?"

A close observer might have seen an effort to repress a smile; but the General did repress it.

"Brother," exclaimed Sir William, rising from his seat, "this is indeed a sad reverse. But bear up manfully; and remember," he added, shaking him warmly by the hand, "that the house and purse of your brother are ever open to you."

"Thank God!" muttered the old soldier, to himself; "my brother's heart is true as steel."

"Beautiful!" lisped Adolphus, throwing himself back in his chair, and stretching out his legs. "My father deals in fine sentiments—he has a good heart."

"It runs away with him," observed her ladyship, who suddenly began to perceive that the presence of a poor relative might be very disagreeable in her splendid mansion in St. James's Square.

"Pity it's all moonshine," added the Captain. "The fact is, General, the governor is poor—dreadfully poor—hasn't got over the last election. Where do you think of going?"

"Going?" repeated his uncle.

"Ay, Cheltenham, I've heard, is a very quiet place: lots of half-pay people reside there. Of course, you have got your half-pay all right?"

"Fear not," said the old man, bitterly. "I shall not be reduced to depend upon my relatives for bread."

"Of course not. Highly spirited and very proper."

"Jane, my dear," continued her uncle, in a light, mocking tone, "read the papers to me?"

"Can't," replied the young lady, brusquely, "I have something else to do." With these words, she flounced out of the room.

Her dream of fortune was gone; and the fine old soldier, whom she had so lately flattered and toadied, became a very uninteresting personage in her eyes.

"Miss Lawrence," said Lady Playwell, who was anxious for an excuse to leave the breakfast-room, "I have some notes to send, will you oblige me with your assistance in my dressing-room. Good morning, General," she added, with an easy yet cold politeness. "Of course, we shall meet at dinner?"

In a few moments, under one pretext or another, the old man, so lately idolised, was left alone.

Despite his queer, sarcastic temper, he had some generous, noble qualities.

He had returned to England prepared to love his brother's children—to adopt them as his own. The shock he had received was a most painful one.

"So," he exclaimed, "this is the tie of blood, the love of kindred! Here have I been wasting my youth and manhood under a burning sun, to pile up wealth for those I thought would love me, and at the first frown of fortune they turn from me with professions of pity, hollow and insulting as their pretended love. I'll punish them," he added, "where only such crawling reptiles feel—in their avarice—in their disappointed

pride. I'll enrich a beggar with my wealth—found an hospital for fools—return to India. Oh!" exclaimed the old man, "it is a bitter thing to stand on earth alone, without one heart to beat for us—one human creature to love us!"

There was a gentle tap at the door of the breakfast-room.

"Come in," said the General, gruffly.

The door opened, and Rigid made his appearance; instead of his usual, free, independent manner, his air was humble and respectful.

"What do you want?" demanded his master.

"Any orders, General?" said the poor fellow.

"No. I suppose you have heard the news, Rigid?"

"I have General; and the worst news it is since I left the service. That French monkey of a valet, Mr. Adolphus's gentleman, as he calls himself, told it out in the servants' hall."

"Did he?"

There was a pause, and Rigid evidently wished to say something, but did not know how to set about it.

His master eyed him curiously; from his usual saucy, blunt behaviour, he expected that the fellow was only anxious to find occasion to leave him.

"Speak out," he muttered roughly, "if you have anything to say."

"I have, General," said the poor man; "I am afraid that I have been very disrespectful lately."

"Pretty well for that."

"Given you a great deal of trouble."

"Humph!"

"It shan't occur again—I promise you that; only let me stay with you—I'll be dutiful as you could wish."

"I can't afford to keep a household on my half-pay," replied his master; "it's little enough for myself."

"You forget my annuity, General."

"No I don't; that is secured to you. You need not be uneasy—enough will remain to pay that."

"Pay it!" exclaimed the old soldier, dashing aside a tear; "perhaps I deserve it—no, I don't," he added. "I own I have been surly, overbearing and independent, but you were rich then. But I did hope you knew Jack Rigid better than to suppose that he could enjoy independence while his old General wanted. Here, take it."

The speaker drew the deed of gift from his bosom and thrust it into his master's hand.

General Playwell was almost choked with emotion.

At the moment he was complaining that there was not a being in the world to care for him, he found under the rough exterior of his servant a fidelity and attachment beyond suspicion.

"No, no," he faltered; "I don't want it."

"Take it," said the man. "You won't? then here goes."

He was in the very act of destroying the deed which gave him independence for life, when his master laid his hand upon his arm, and arrested his intention.

"Rigid," he said, with a smile and a tear upon his fine old countenance, "listen to me—you can keep a secret?"

"Try me, General."

"It's all a hoax—I am not ruined."

"Not ruined!" repeated the astonished servant; "why, what the devil"—

"Hush! it's only meant to try the affections of my relatives."

The features of the human crab-apple, as his master termed him, suddenly assumed their former appearance of dissatisfaction and independence.

He hastily thrust the deed into his pocket, exclaiming, in a surly tone:

"Like you: you are always playing some fool's trick or other. As for your fine relatives, it was all very well to deceive them; but to play such a deception on me! No matter—I'll tell them a bit of my mind."

"Not for the world!"

"Won't I!" said the man, moving towards the door.

"Halt!" exclaimed the General, in a tone of command."

Instinctively the old soldier drew up, and saluted, military fashion.

"Serjeant Rigid is ordered," continued his master, in the same tone, "to keep his tongue close prisoner till further orders. Given at head-quarters. Playwell, General in Command. Stand at ease! Dismiss!"

Rigid saluted — wheeled towards the door, and marched out.

The General, who had taken this singular mode of communicating his wishes, felt convinced they would be implicitly obeyed. The old soldier very likely might have resisted his entreaties ; but a military order he was never known to break—like his master, he was a thorough disciplinarian.

CHAPTER XIX.

Virtue and poverty are hourly shamed
By the world's passions. Vice, in gaudy trim,
Assaults poor innocence at every step.

OLD PLAY.

WHILST General Playwell was supposed to be rich, his presence acted as a protection to Amy Lawrence against the persecutions of his nephew ; but no sooner was he thought to be poor, than they were renewed with all their former insolence.

Vainly had the poor girl written both to Doctor Currey and her friends the Bowleses—no letter arrived ; and day after day she waited for a reply with all the sickening anxiety of an aching heart.

And well might she wait ; for the unprincipled Captain, piqued by her coldness, had bribed the servant whose duty it was to take all the letters of the family to the post to abstract hers from the bag ; and those which arrived from Mary Heartland and her friends were likewise kept from her.

On entering the drawing-room earlier than usual one morning, Adolphus found the unhappy girl in tears.

The puppy flattered himself that he had at last

made an impression ; and, full of this idea, ventured to press his suit.

" Really, Miss Amy, I am distressed to see you in grief. Come," he added, " be reasonable—ask yourself if it is not your own fault?"

" Indeed, sir, it is not," replied the young lady ; " it is my misfortune."

" Is love always a misfortune?" demanded the young man with a conceited smile. " I am sure he must have an insensible heart that could be cold to such charms—a very different one from mine. Amy," he continued, " I adore you—I have told you so a hundred times. I can't live without you—upon my honour I can't; despite your coldness, which is very proper, no doubt, before my mother and sister, I am equally convinced that I am not indifferent to you. Come, confess that you love me?"

" Sir," said the astonished Amy, " I had hoped that this ridiculous scene would not be repeated. How often have I told you that, even if our rank in life were the same, I could never consent to be your wife."

" Wife!" repeated the coxcomb, regarding her with an air of amused surprise, as if he wondered how any girl in her senses in Amy's humble position could entertain such an ambitious thought. " *Why, yes, perhaps in time you might*; for I daresay I should become very fond of you."

The blush of outraged virtue rose to the pale cheek of the unprotected girl, and her mild eyes suddenly flashed

with scorn. Hitherto she had deemed his intentions at least honourable. Even under that supposition they were insupportable to her, for she despised him no less for his fatuity than his presumption.

But the idea that she could ever descend to become his mistress made her loathe him.

For the first time she felt all the bitterness of her dependent position.

She tried to speak, but tears choked her utterance, and she hid her burning countenance with her trembling hands.

"There now," continued the puppy, who attributed her emotion to a cause far more flattering to his vanity, "don't weep! though some girls never look so beautiful as when they are in tears. I did not say absolutely that I should not marry you. We shall have time to arrange all that at a future moment, my sweet girl."

He tried to take her hand—the touch seemed to electrify her, and she started back as though she had trodden upon a venomous creeping thing.

Pride—innocence—the memory of the past—all came to her aid, and she answered him with a calm bitterness, scarcely to have been expected from one of her years and naturally gentle disposition.

"If I have hitherto remained silent, sir, it was that indignation at your infamous proposal struck me almost dumb. Your egregious vanity would be amusing were it not insulting; but I have yet to learn that emptiness of head can atone for want of heart.

Had your addresses been honourable to me, they would have been distasteful. Till this hour I imagined there could not be a more wretched, pitiable creature than the woman who accepted at your hands the name of wife. I was deceived. I find there is a depth of misery and degradation yet more profound—your mistress. Pardon me, if, with this conviction, I decline the honour you so *delicately propose*."

Like most fools, Captain Playwell was keenly sensitive to ridicule. His friends might cheat him at play—he either returned the compliment or forgave them; but a jest at his expense he never pardoned.

The cold irony of Amy's reply inflicted a wound upon his vanity deeper than any he had yet received.

Passionate reproaches he could have borne—he was accustomed to them from his victims; but calm contempt was a weapon he had never felt till now, and he writhed beneath the wound.

His features became suddenly livid, and his lips of the same waxy hue.

Had he not been in station a gentleman, he could have struck her; as it was, he resolved that the blow should fall upon her heart.

"'Tis well," he said, mastering his rage with a violent effort; "I am not one of those who easily abandon a pursuit, especially where beauty is concerned. You have not endured poverty yet—the coldness of friends—the chill of the world. When that hour arrives, you will think better of my offer."

"Never!" exclaimed Amy, with energy—"never! Hope not of—dream not of it. I know not what sufferings my evil fortune may have in store; I can welcome them a thousand times rather than that degradation which has no name, save on the lips of the heartless and corrupted. Nor will I," she added, "further submit to insult."

With these words, although her heart swelled with emotion, the poor girl quitted the room, and sought refuge in her own chamber, where a flood of tears came to her relief.

Now, indeed, did she feel what it was to be alone in the world, without the protection of a brother's arm—a lover's watchful care. How she pined for the home at Burnley. The extraordinary silence of her friends chilled her, yet she did not accuse them of unkindness.

She thought it only natural that they should forget one whom all but heaven seemed to have abandoned.

Little did Amy deem that the Bowleses were afflicted at her supposed neglect; that both William, Mary Heartland, and the old lady, had repeatedly written to her, and felt wounded at her not replying. The father was so annoyed that, but for William's departure for St. Petersburg, which threw all the correspondence and affairs of the house upon his hands, he would have undertaken a journey to London to ascertain the cause of her silence.

"She is sick," he would say, "I am sure she is sick. Amy will never prove ungrateful."

And he was right: the orphan was sick with the worst disease which wears the frame and dims the eye, drinks the blood of youth, and withers the rose upon the cheek of health—*sick at heart!*

Little did Amy and her friends dream that their correspondence, by the artful contrivance of Captain Playwell, had been intercepted.

His aim was to isolate her from those who could either cross his purpose or sustain the poor girl in her struggles with a cold and selfish world.

“Courage—courage!” she exclaimed, as soon as she had recovered from the first burst of grief. “This is no time for idle tears, but action. God will not desert the orphan whose heart is turned to him. The world may fall from us, friends forget us, misery try us; but if we are faithful to ourselves, He will be faithful to us too!”

Strengthened with these reflections, Amy dried her tears, and dressing herself as plainly as possible, left the house.

After the insult she had received, all thought of remaining under the same roof with Captain Playwell was at an end.

In her distress she recollected a quiet, sickly-looking girl, whose manners denoted that she had not always been dependent upon her needle for bread, who frequently brought home work from the milliner whom Lady Playwell and Miss Jane Clara employed.

The indignant blush with which she had received a

coarse compliment which Adolphus—who happened to be present in his mother's boudoir on some occasion when she called—had given Amy a good opinion of her, and she determined to seek her address at her employers.

It was not far—one of the fashionable shops in Regent Street.

On entering the establishment of Madame la Trappe, Amy found herself in a room filled with showy, fashionably-dressed girls, such as are generally known by the term of model-girls in the trade.

Although occupied at their needle, work was the least part of their duty: no sooner did a new fashion in robe, corsage or visite appear, than the young person whom it was thought most to become was attired in it, in order that the Countess of A—— or the Duchess of B—— might judge of the effect.

Very frequently the aristocratic patronesses of the establishment were surprised to find how different the same dress appeared upon their own faded persons and the young creatures upon whom they had just admired it.

The ladies raised their eyes with a supercilious glance on the entrance of Amy, whose simple attire produced no favourable idea of her position.

The mistress of the house scarcely deigned to rise from her seat, as she coldly demanded her pleasure.

“You have a young person who works for you, Madame,” she replied, “whose name I am unacquainted

with, but whose address I am anxious to obtain—a tall, blue-eyed young lady, with auburn hair; pale—very pale, as if lately suffering from some indisposition.”

“Really, I have so many workwomen, and take so little notice of their appearance, that I shall be puzzled to give you the name,” answered Madame la Trappe.

“I mean,” added the inquirer, “the young lady who brought home my friend Lady Playwell’s rich velvet dress.”

The words “my friend Lady Playwell,” produced their due effect.

Her ladyship was celebrated as a leader of *ton*—one of Madame’s best customers; and any friend of her’s must be a person of importance—at least so thought the milliner.

Amy had used the word merely in a conventional sense, and without the slightest intention of deceiving her as to her real position in society.

The Frenchwoman rose from her chair, and begged her visitor to take a seat.

“I recollect,” she said, “perfectly well—Miss Wyndham, a charming young lady, and an excellent needlewoman—a *leetle* singular in her ideas. Would you believe it—although I have twice offered her a position in my house amongst my young ladies, who are all of them of good family and connections, she prefers working in her own lodgings, where she cannot earn half so much. Miss Binge,” she added, turning to the

eldest of the shopwomen, "look for Miss Wyndham's address.

It was soon found, and copied by the person who had received the orders.

"Thank you," said Amy, quietly.

"Can I show you any of our new arrivals from Paris?" demanded Madame; "I have a love of a *robe de matin* which would just suit the charming figure of—may I ask," she added, not knowing whether to say whether madame or miss, "whom I have the honour of addressing?"

"My name," replied her visitor, "is but of little consequence, since I am not likely to become one of your *clientelle*."

Thanking her for her polite compliance with her request, Amy left the shop, and directed her steps to the quiet street at the back of the Abbey, where the person she sought resided.

On entering the humble house, Amy found the object of her search seated near the window, industriously plying her needle at a magnificent ball-dress, which the favoured child of fortune, who was to wear it, little deemed had cost one equally fair, but less happy than herself, two sleepless nights to complete.

A faint blush of pleasure suffused the pale cheek of the sempstress, as she recognised in her visitor the kind girl whose look of sympathy had won her gratitude on the occasion of her visit to Lady Playwell.

With well-bred ease she rose and offered her a seat,

at the same time demanding to what circumstance she was indebted for the honour of her visit.

"To my misfortunes," replied Amy; "and the kind countenance which assured me that I should find a friend in you. Like yourself I have been insulted by the infamous attentions of Captain Playwell. My residence in the house is no longer compatible with my self-respect, and I came to ask you if you can put me in the way of living as you do, by the honest, independent labour of my hands."

"Oh, willingly—cheerfully!" replied Fanny—for that was the sempstress's name—with a joyous smile; "my heart opened to you from the first moment I saw you. It is little—very little, I can do for you," she added, with a faint smile; "but that little you may command. The season, fortunately, is a busy one, and there is no lack of employment; but have you considered the privation—the solitude of a life like mine?"

"I have."

"I fear you will never submit to it."

"Fear not that," replied the courageous Amy; "there are feelings and memories which will support me. I am strong—am used to work; for my life, if not one of usefulness, has been full of privations. I am alone in the world—all who loved me have either forgotten me or are dead—I have not one friend left."

"Yes," said Fanny "one—who, if you will permit her, will share her humble home with you. With such a friend my chamber will no longer appear a solitude—

content needs so little, and that little our industry will supply. What say you?" she added, extending her hand; "will you be my friend—my sister?"

A close embrace was the reply.

Amy wept; she had found what her heart so yearned for—one to sympathise with, assist, and console her.

That same evening the orphan left the splendid mansion in St. James's Square, and took up her abode with Fanny Wyndham, after leaving a note of adieu and explanation for Lady Playwell.

The two poor girls cast thus strangely together soon became strongly attached, and the chamber of the poor sempstress from that day became the abode of friendship, as it had previously been of innocence; and if neither of the inmates were happy, they strove to be content.



